

# COLONIAL PEARL.

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## TRAVELS.

Extracts from "Sporting in Southern Africa."

### THE DESERT.

We had now fairly quitted civilization, and were entering upon a sterile, inhospitable region, sparingly inhabited by Bushmen—the remnant of Hottentot hordes, and the wild aborigines of the country—who, gradually receding before the encroachments of the European colonists, have long since sought refuge in the pathless desert. Unblessed amongst the nations of the earth, the hand of these wandering outcasts is against every man, and every man's hand is against them. Existing precariously from day to day—heedless of futurity, and forgetful of the past,—without either laws, arts, or religion—only a faint glimmering ray of instinct guides their benighted path. Depending for subsistence upon the produce of the chase or the spontaneous gifts of nature, they share the wilderness with beasts of prey, and are but one grade higher in the scale of existence.

From this point until we reached Kuruman, a distance of 300 miles, the number of our oxen became daily diminished by the effects of a drought which had prevailed, and which had so completely removed every vestige of vegetation, that they were frequently compelled to pass two days without tasting food or water. Extensive—to the eye boundless—plains of arid land, with neither eminence nor hollow, were on all sides expanded to the view: of these the prevailing colour was brownish yellow, variegated with a few black and sickly shrubs. Scarcely an object met the straining eye but an ostrich sometimes striding in the distance, or a solitary vulture soaring in the sky. Over the wide desolation of the stony waste not a tree could be discerned, and the only impression on the mind was—that of utter and hopeless sterility. Occasionally, however, as we advanced, the sameness of the scene was varied by a wide-stretching undulation. Our caravan was then the only object in the landscape upon which the eye could repose. Waggon after waggon slowly rising to view, the van was to be seen advancing over the swell, whilst the cattle and sheep were yet hidden from the sight. The world before us was still nought but earth and sky—not a green herb enticed the vision, not a bird winged through the air: the loud cracking of a whip, rolling in suppressed echo along the sun-baked ground, alone disturbed the silence of the sultry atmosphere, which gave to the azure vault of heaven the semblance of an unnatural elevation from the globe.

Whilst the days were oppressively hot, and the sky unveiled by a cloud, the nights were piercingly cold—our feelings during the latter indicating, as well as the thermometer, that the temperature was near the freezing point: and, to add to our discomfort, fuel was rarely procurable. In the morning the ground was sometimes covered with hoar-frost: but the absence either of vapour or cloud to diminish the heat of the sun, soon dispelled the appearance, and rendered visible the nakedness of the land. Mirage in these regions, flickering in the distance, presents to the thirsty traveller an illusion as tempting as tantalizing. Blue and delusive lakes, of which the surface seems agitated by a ripple, recedes as he advances—and, ultimately disappearing, "leave not a wreck behind."

We halted the first day on the borders of what appeared to be a body of water many miles in circumference—an oasis in the desert, towards which, after a sultry march of twenty miles, lured by the appearance of several waggons on its brink—both man and beast rushed with impetuosity. We soon perceived to our disappointment that we had been deceived by a saline deposit of immense extent, at which a party of boors were engaged in obtaining salt for the use of the colonists: but it was long ere the broken-hearted oxen discovered that what they had understood to be water was a mere mineral efflorescence in the desert.

The fourth day brought us to the magnificent Orange River—the only stream within many hundred miles that is entitled to the appellation. Emerging from desolation and sterility, the first glimpse that we obtained of it realized those ideas of elegant and classic scenery which exist in the minds of the poets. The alluring fancies of a fairy fiction, or the fascinating imagery of a romance, were here brought into actual existence. The waters of this majestic river, 300 yards in breadth, flowing in one unbroken expanse, resembled a smooth translucent lake; and as its gentle waves glided past on their way to join the restless ocean, bearing on their limpid bosom, as in a polished mirror, the image of their wood-clothed borders, they seemed to kiss the shore before bidding it farewell. Drooping willows, clad in their vest of vernal freshness, leaned over the bank, and, dipping their slender branches into the tide, which glistened with the last rays of the setting sun, seemed fain to follow

whilst at intervals the wrecks of stately trees, that had been torn from their roots by the violence of the torrent during some vast inundation, of which the traces on the shore gave evidence, reared their dilapidated heads in token of the then resistless fury of that flood which now appeared so smooth and tranquil. To those who may consider this description overcharged, I will only remark, that the sight of water after days in the desert is probably one of the most delightful sensations that a human being can experience.

### BUSHMEN.

The pigmy race usually reside in holes and crannies of rocks, and sometimes in wretched huts incapable of protecting them from the inclemency of the seasons. These, their constant fear of discovery induces them to erect in secluded spots at a great distance from water: a precaution to which they are further prompted by a desire to leave the pools open for wild animals, which they constantly shoot from an ambush with poisoned arrows, and devour on the spot. They possess neither flocks nor herds, are unacquainted with agriculture, and the most wealthy can boast of no property beyond his weapons and his starving dog. With no cares beyond the present moment, they live almost entirely upon bulbous roots, locusts, reptiles, and the larvæ of ants, by the habitations of which latter the country is in many places thickly strewed. Not a trace of their hovels could be seen from the road, and a traveller might even pass through their country without seeing a human being, or suspecting that it was inhabited. Such is their general distrust of visitors, that the males would never willingly approach us, evincing great trepidation when forced to do so—no object being more unwelcome to their sight than a troop of horsemen on the plain.

The stature of both sexes is invariably below five feet. The males are usually meagre, bow-legged, and ill-made: yet they display a singular ease of motion and flexibility of joint. The rapidity with which they drive off a herd of cattle is perfectly astonishing. Their complexion is sallow brown, darkened by dirt and grease: their only dress a piece of leather round the waist, and their sole defence a diminutive bow, with poisoned arrows, rather resembling children's toys than mortal weapons.

The women, who were much less shy, and who never failed to follow the tracks of our waggons when they happened to come upon them, with the hope of obtaining tobacco in exchange for ostrich eggs, are of small and delicate proportions, with hand and feet of truly Lilliputian dimensions. Their foot-prints reminded us of Gulliver's adventures, and are not larger than those of a child. When young they have a pleasing expression of countenance, which they take care to render as captivating as possible by be-daubing their flat noses and prominent cheek-bones with a mixture of red ochre and fat. The toilets of many were made with scrupulous attention, the effect of the paint being enhanced by necklaces composed of the fresh entrails of wild beasts—a few cowry-shells, old bones and buttons, being also interwoven with their matted hair: but the life they lead, their frequent long abstinence, and constant exposure to the wind and glare of light in a dry open country, soon inducing the habit of keeping their naturally small eyes more than half closed, their comeliness is very ephemeral, and never extends beyond youth. The females possess much greater volubility and animation of gesture than the men—but the sounds they utter are a succession of claps of the tongue produced by forcing that unruly member against different parts of the teeth and palate: and, whilst the enunciation is thus rendered troublesome and full of impediment, it resembles rather the chattering of monkeys than the language of human beings.

### BECHUANA TRIBES.

Of the habiliments of the Bechuana men little need be said, as they have generally adopted a rude imitation of the European costume. The females, however, almost invariably retain the garb of their ancestors. The appearance of these ladies is masculine, and far from attractive. Fat and grease of all kinds form their delight: their bodies and skin cloaks being also plentifully anointed with *sibilo*, a grey iron ore sparkling like mica, procured from mines in the neighbourhood, which are visited from all parts of the country. Their naturally woolly hair is twisted into small cords, and matted with this substance into apparently metallic pendules, which, being of equal length, assume the appearance of a skull-cap or inverted bowl of steel. Tobacco having undergone considerable depreciation by the introduction of the plant—beads are the medium through which exchanges are usually effected amongst the Bechuana. The more wealthy of their women are adorned with a profusion of these, hung in cumbrous coils round the waste and neck, along with ivory tooth-picks and gourd snuff-boxes: but even the

indigent are not altogether without them. An apron of leather, cut into thin strips, and clotted with an accumulation of grease and filth, reaches to the ankles—and, with a rude skin cloak, completes the costume.

### HERDS OF QUAGGAS. &c.

The clatter of their hoofs was perfectly astounding, and I could compare it to nothing but to the din of a tremendous charge of cavalry, or the rushing of a mighty tempest. I could not estimate the accumulated number at less than fifteen thousand; a great extent of country being actually chequered black and white with their congregated masses. As the panic caused by the report of our rifles extended, clouds of dust hovered over them; and the long necks of troops of ostriches were also to be seen, towering above the heads of their less gigantic neighbours, and sailing past with astonishing rapidity. Groups of purple sassaybs [*Acronotus Lunata*], and brilliant red and yellow hartebeests, likewise lent their aid to complete the picture, which must have been seen to be properly understood, and which beggars all attempt at description. The savages kept in our wake, dexterously despatching the wounded gnooks by a touch on the spine with the point of an assegai, and instantly covering up the carcasses with bushes, to secure them from the voracity of the vultures, which hung about us like specks in the firmament, and descended with the velocity of lightning, as each discharge of our artillery gave token of prey. As we proceeded, two strange figures were perceived standing under the shade of a tree; these we instantly knew to be elands [*Boselaphus Oreatis*], the savages at the same moment exclaiming with evident delight, *Impofo, Impofo*, and, pressing our horses to the utmost speed, we found ourselves, for the first time, at the heels of the largest and most beautiful species of the antelope tribe. Notwithstanding the unwieldy shape of these animals, they had, at first, greatly the speed of our jaded horses; but, being pushed, they soon separated; their sleek coats turned first blue and then white with froth; the foam fell from their mouths and nostrils, and the perspiration from their sides. Their pace gradually slackened, and, with their full brilliant eyes turned imploringly towards us, at the end of a mile, each was laid low by a single ball. They were young bulls, measuring upwards of seventeen hands at the shoulder.

### A HERALD.

Soon afterwards appeared one of King Moselekats's heralds, whose bearing upon occasions of ceremony we beg to recommend to the notice of Garter, Clarenceux, and their august brethren.

We were preparing to start, when a herald, called in the Matibili language *Imbongo*—i.e. a proclaimer of the king's title—suddenly made his appearance outside the kraal to give us a little insight into his majesty's biography. Advancing slowly towards the waggons he opened the exhibition by roaring and charging, in frantic imitation of the king of beasts—then, placing his arm before his mouth and swinging it rapidly in pantomimic representation of the elephant, he threw his trunk above his head and shrilly trumpeted. He next ran on tiptoe imitating the ostrich, and lastly, humbling himself in the dust, wept like an infant. At each interval of the scene, he recounted the matchless prowess and mighty conquests of his illustrious monarch, and made the hills re-echo with his praise. He was a brawny athletic savage, upwards of six feet in height, naked as he was born. Frenzied by his energetic gesticulations, the perspiration trickled from his greasy brow, and white foam descended in flakes from his distorted mouth, whilst his eyes glared with excitement.

### LIONS.

The new moon brought, if possible, a more abundant supply of rain than usual; nor did the lions fail to take advantage of the nocturnal tempest, having twice endeavoured to effect an entrance into the cattle-fold. It continued, until nine o'clock the next morning, to pour with such violence, that we were unable to open the canvas curtains of the waggon. Peeping out, however, to ascertain if there was any prospect of its clearing up, we perceived three lions squatted within an hundred yards in the open plain, attentively watching the oxen. Our rifles were hastily seized, but the dampness of the atmosphere prevented their exploding. One after another, too, the Hottentots sprang out of the pack-waggon, and snapped their guns at the unwelcome intruders, as they trotted sulkily away, and took up their position on a stony eminence at no great distance. Fresh caps and priming were applied, and a broadside was followed by the instantaneous demise of the largest, whose cranium was perforated by two bullets at the same instant. Swinging their tails over their backs, the sur-