

Reid Mayne

**Odd People: Being a Popular  
Description of Singular Races of  
Man**



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# Mayne Reid

## Odd People: Being a Popular Description of Singular Races of Man

### Chapter One. Bosjesmen, or Bushmen

Perhaps no race of people has more piqued the curiosity of the civilised world than those little yellow savages of South Africa, known as the *Bushmen*. From the first hour in which European nations became acquainted with their existence, a keen interest was excited by the stories told of their peculiar character and habits; and although they have been visited by many travellers, and many descriptions have been given of them, it is but truth to say, that the interest in them has not yet abated, and the Bushmen of Africa are almost as great a curiosity at this hour as they were when Di Gama first doubled the Cape. Indeed, there is no reason why this should not be, for the habits and personal appearance of these savages are just now as they were then, and our familiarity with them is not much greater. Whatever has been added to our knowledge of their character, has tended rather to increase than diminish our curiosity.

At first the tales related of them were supposed to be filled with wilful exaggerations, and the early travellers were accused of dealing too much in the marvellous. This is a very common accusation brought against the early travellers; and in some instances it is a just one. But in regard to the accounts given of the Bushmen and their habits there has been far less exaggeration than might be supposed; and the more insight we obtain into their peculiar customs and modes of subsistence, the more do we become satisfied that almost everything alleged of them is true. In fact, it would be difficult for the most inventive genius to contrive a fanciful account, that would be much more curious or interesting than the real and *bonâ fide* truth that can be told about this most peculiar people.

Where do the Bushmen dwell? what is their country? These are questions not so easily answered, as in reality they are not supposed to possess any country at all, any more than the wild animals amidst which they roam, and upon whom they prey. There is no Bushman's country upon the map, though several spots in Southern Africa have at times received this designation. It is not possible, therefore, to delineate the boundaries of their country, since it has no boundaries, any more than that of the wandering Gypsies of Europe.

If the Bushmen, however, have no country in the proper sense of the word, they have a "range," and one of the most extensive character – since it covers the whole southern portion of the African continent, from the Cape of Good Hope to the twentieth degree of south latitude, extending east and west from the country of the Cafires to the Atlantic Ocean. Until lately it was believed that the Bushman-range did not extend far to the north of the Orange river; but this has proved an erroneous idea. They have recently "turned up" in the land of the Dammaras, and also in the great Kalahari desert, hundreds of miles north from the Orange river and it is not certain that they do not range still nearer to the equatorial line – though it may be remarked that the country in that direction does not favour the supposition, not being of the peculiar nature of a Bushman's country. The Bushman requires a desert for his dwelling-place. It is an absolute necessity of his nature, as it is to the ostrich and many species of animals; and north of the twentieth degree of latitude, South Africa does not appear to be of this character. The heroic Livingstone has dispelled the long-cherished illusion of the Geography about the "*Great-sanded level*" of these interior regions; and, instead, disclosed to the world a fertile land, well watered, and covered with a profuse and luxuriant vegetation. In such a land there will be no Bushmen.

The limits we have allowed them, however, are sufficiently large, – fifteen degrees of latitude, and an equally extensive range from east to west. It must not be supposed, however, that they *populate* this vast territory. On the contrary, they are only distributed over it *in spots*, in little communities, that have no relationship or connection with one another, but are separated by wide intervals, sometimes of hundreds of miles in extent. It is only in the desert tracts of South Africa that the Bushmen exist, – in the karoos, and treeless, waterless plains – among the barren ridges and rocky defiles – in the ravines formed by the beds of dried-up rivers – in situations so sterile, so remote, so wild and inhospitable as to offer a home to no other human being save the Bushman himself.

If we state more particularly the localities where the haunts of the Bushman are to be found, we may specify the barren lands on both sides of the Orange river, – including most of its headwaters, and down to its mouth, – and also the Great Kalahari desert. Through all this extensive region the *kraals* of the Bushmen may be encountered. At one time they were common enough within the limits of the Cape colony itself, and some half-caste remnants still exist in the more remote districts; but the cruel persecution of the *boers* has had the effect of extirpating these unfortunate savages; and, like the elephant, the ostrich, and the eland, the true wild Bushman is now only to be met with beyond the frontiers of the colony.

About the origin of the Bushmen we can offer no opinion. They are generally considered as a branch of the great Hottentot family; but this theory is far from being an established fact. When South Africa was first discovered and colonised, both Hottentots and Bushmen were found there, differing from each other just as they differ at this day; and though there are some striking points of resemblance between them, there are also points of dissimilarity that are equally as striking, if we regard the two people as one. In personal appearance there is a certain general likeness: that is, both are woolly-haired, and both have a Chinese cast of features, especially in the form and expression of the eye. Their colour too is nearly the same; but, on the other hand, the Hottentots are larger than the Bushmen. It is not in their persons, however, that the most essential points of dissimilarity are to be looked for, but rather in their mental characters; and here we observe distinctions so marked and antithetical, that it is difficult to reconcile them with the fact that these two people are of one race. Whether a different habit of life has produced this distinctive character, or whether *it* has influenced the habits of life, are questions not easily answered. We only know that a strange anomaly exists – the anomaly of two people being personally alike – that is, possessing physical characteristics that seem to prove them of the same race, while intellectually, as we shall presently see, they have scarce one character in common. The slight resemblance that exists between the languages of the two is not to be regarded as a proof of their common origin. It only shows that they have long lived in juxtaposition, or contiguous to each other; a fact which cannot be denied.

In giving a more particular description of the Bushman, it will be seen in what respect he resembles the true Hottentot, and in what he differs from him, both physically and mentally, and this description may now be given.

The Bushman is the smallest man with whom we are acquainted; and if the terms “dwarf” and “pigmy” may be applied to any race of human beings, the South-African Bushmen presents the fairest claim to these titles. He stands only 4 feet 6 inches upon his naked soles – never more than 4 feet 9, and not unfrequently is he encountered of still less height – even so diminutive as 4 feet 2. His wife is of still shorter stature, and this Lilliputian lady is often the mother of children when the crown of her head is just 3 feet 9 inches above the soles of her feet. It has been a very common thing to contradict the assertion that these people are such pigmies in stature, and even Dr Livingstone has done so in his late magnificent work. The doctor states, very jocosely, that they are “not dwarfish – that the specimens brought to Europe have been selected, like costermongers’ dogs, for their extreme ugliness.”

But the doctor forgets that it is but from “the specimens brought to Europe” that the above standard of the Bushman’s height has been derived, but from the testimony of numerous travellers

– many of them as trustworthy as the doctor himself – from actual measurements made by them upon the spot. It is hardly to be believed that such men as Sparmann and Burchell, Barrow and Lichtenstein, Harris, Campbell, Patterson, and a dozen others that might be mentioned, should all give an erroneous testimony on this subject. These travellers have differed notoriously on other points, but in this they all agree, that a Bushman of five feet in height is a *tall* man in his tribe. Dr Livingstone speaks of Bushmen “six feet high,” and these are the tribes lately discovered living so far north as the Lake Nagami. It is doubtful whether these are Bushmen at all. Indeed, the description given by the doctor, not only of their height and the colour of their skin, but also some hints about their intellectual character, would lead to the belief that he has mistaken some other people for Bushmen. It must be remembered that the experience of this great traveller has been chiefly among the *Bechuana* tribes, and his knowledge of the Bushman proper does not appear to be either accurate or extensive. No man is expected to know everybody; and amid the profusion of new facts, which the doctor has so liberally laid before the world, it would be strange if a few inaccuracies should not occur. Perhaps we should have more confidence if this was the only one we are enabled to detect; but the doctor also denies that there is anything either terrific or majestic in the “roaring of the lion.” Thus speaks he: “The same feeling which has induced the modern painter to caricature the lion has led the sentimentalist to consider the lion’s roar as the most terrific of all earthly sounds. We hear of the ‘majestic roar of the king of beasts.’ To talk of the majestic roar of the lion is mere majestic twaddle.”

The doctor is certainly in error here. Does he suppose that any one is ignorant of the character of the lion’s roar? Does he fancy that no one has ever heard it but himself? If it be necessary to go to South Africa to take the true measure of a Bushman, it is not necessary to make that long journey in order to obtain a correct idea of the compass of the lion’s voice. We can hear it at home in all its modulations; and any one who has ever visited the Zoological Gardens in Regent’s Park – nay, any one who chances to live within half a mile of that magnificent menagerie – will be very much disposed to doubt the correctness of the doctor’s assertion. If there be a sound upon the earth above all others “majestic,” a noise above all others “terrific,” it is certainly the *roar* of the lion. Ask Albert Terrace and Saint John’s Wood!

But let us not be too severe upon the doctor. The world is indebted to him much more than to any other modern traveller, and all great men indulge occasionally in the luxury of an eccentric opinion. We have brought the point forward here for a special purpose, – to illustrate a too much neglected truth. Error is not always on the side of *exaggeration*; but is sometimes also found in the opposite extreme of a too-squeamish moderation. We find the learned Professor Lichtenstein ridiculing poor old Hernandez, the natural historian of Mexico, for having given a description of certain fabulous animals —*fabulous*, he terms them, because to him they were odd and unknown. But it turns out that the old author was right, and the *animals exist!* How many similar misconceptions might be recorded of the Buffons, and other closet philosophers – urged, too, with the most bitter zeal! Incredulity carried too far is but another form of credulity.

But to return to our proper theme, and complete the portrait of the Bushman. We have given his height. It is in tolerable proportion to his other dimensions. When young, he appears stout enough; but this is only when a mere boy. At the age of sixteen he has reached all the manhood he is ever destined to attain; and then his flesh disappears; his body assumes a meagre outline; his arms and limbs grow thin; the calf disappears from his legs; the plumpness from his cheeks; and altogether he becomes as wretched-looking an object as it is possible to conceive in human shape. Older, his skin grows dry, corrugated, and scaly; his bones protrude; and his knee, elbow, and ankle-joints appear like horny knobs placed at the ends of what more resemble long straight sticks than the arms and limbs of a human being.

The colour of this creature may be designated a yellow-brown, though it is not easy to determine it to a shade. The Bushman appears darker than he really is; since his skin serves him for a towel, and every species of dirt that discommodes his fingers he gets rid of by wiping it off on his arms,

sides, or breast. The result is, that his whole body is usually coated over with a stratum of grease and filth, which has led to the belief that he regularly anoints himself – a custom common among many savage tribes. This, however, the Bushman does not do: the smearing toilet is merely occasional or accidental, and consists simply in the fat of whatever flesh he has been eating being transferred from his fingers to the cuticle of his body. This is never washed off again – for water never touches the Bushman's hide. Such a use of water is entirely unknown to him, not even for washing his face. Should he have occasion to cleanse his hands – which the handling of gum or some like substance sometimes compels him to do – he performs the operation, not with soap and water, but with the dry dung of cattle or some wild animal. A little rubbing of this upon his skin is all the purification the Bushman believes to be needed.

Of course, the dirt darkens his complexion; but he has the vanity at times to brighten it up – not by making it whiter – but rather a brick-red. A little ochreous earth produces the colour he requires; and with this he smears his body all over – not excepting even the crown of his head, and the scant stock of wool that covers it.

Bushmen have been washed. It requires some scrubbing, and a plentiful application either of soda or soap, to reach the true skin and bring out the natural colour; but the experiment has been made, and the result proves that the Bushman is not so black as, under ordinary circumstances, he appears. A yellow hue shines through the epidermis, somewhat like the colour of the Chinese, or a European in the worst stage of jaundice – the eye only not having that complexion. Indeed, the features of the Bushman, as well as the Hottentot, bear a strong similarity to those of the Chinese, and the Bushman's eye is essentially of the Mongolian type. His hair, however, is entirely of another character. Instead of being long, straight, and lank, it is short, crisp, and curly, – in reality, wool. Its scantiness is a characteristic; and in this respect the Bushman differs from the woolly-haired tribes both of Africa and Australasia. These generally have “fleeces” in profusion, whereas both Hottentot and Bushman have not enough to half cover their scalps; and between the little knot-like “kinks” there are wide spaces without a single hair upon them. The Bushman's “wool” is naturally black, but red ochre and the sun soon convert the colour into a burnt reddish hue.

The Bushman has no beard or other hairy encumbrances. Were they to grow, he would root them out as useless inconveniences. He has a low-bridged nose, with wide flattened nostrils; an eye that appears a mere slit between the eyelids; a pair of high cheek-bones, and a receding forehead. His lips are not thick, as in the negro, and he is furnished with a set of fine white teeth, which, as he grows older, do not decay, but present the singular phenomenon of being regularly worn down to the stumps – as occurs to the teeth of sheep and other ruminant animals.

Notwithstanding the small stature of the Bushman, his frame is wiry and capable of great endurance. He is also as agile as an antelope.

From the description above given, it will be inferred that the Bushman is no beauty. Neither is the Bushwoman; but, on the contrary, both having passed the period of youth, become absolutely ugly, – the woman, if possible, more so than the man.

And yet, strange to say, many of the Bush-girls, when young, have a cast of prettiness almost amounting to beauty. It is difficult to tell in what this beauty consists. Something, perhaps, in the expression of the oblique almond-shaped eye, and the small well-formed mouth and lips, with the shining white teeth. Their limbs, too, at this early age, are often well-rounded; and many of them exhibit forms that might serve as models for a sculptor. Their feet are especially well-shaped, and, in point of size, they are by far the smallest in the world. Had the Chinese ladies been gifted by nature with such little feet, they might have been spared the torture of compressing them.

The foot of a Bushwoman rarely measures so much as six inches in length; and full-grown girls have been seen, whose feet, submitted to the test of an actual measurement, proved but a very little over four inches!

Intellectually, the Bushman does not rank so low as is generally believed. He has a quick, cheerful mind, that appears ever on the alert, – as may be judged by the constant play of his little piercing black eye, – and though he does not always display much skill in the manufacture of his weapons, he can do so if he pleases. Some tribes construct their bows, arrows, fish-baskets, and other implements and utensils with admirable ingenuity; but in general the Bushman takes no pride in fancy weapons. He prefers having them effective, and to this end he gives proof of his skill in the manufacture of *most deadly poisons* with which to anoint his arrows. Furthermore, he is ever active and ready for action; and in this his mind is in complete contrast with that of the Hottentot, with whom indolence is a predominant and well-marked characteristic. The Bushman, on the contrary, is always on the *qui vive*; always ready to be doing where there is anything to do; and there is not much opportunity for him to be idle, as he rarely ever knows where the next meal is to come from. The ingenuity which he displays in the capture of various kinds of game, – far exceeding that of other hunting tribes of Africa, – as also the cunning exhibited by him while engaged in cattle-stealing and other plundering forays, prove an intellectual capacity more than proportioned to his diminutive body; and, in short, in nearly every mental characteristic does he differ from the supposed cognate race – the Hottentot.

It would be hardly just to give the Bushman a character for high courage; but, on the other hand, it would be as unjust to charge him with cowardice. Small as he is, he shows plenty of “pluck,” and when brought to bay, his motto is, “No surrender.” He will fight to the death, discharging his poisoned arrows as long as he is able to bend a bow. Indeed, he has generally been treated to shooting, or clubbing to death, wherever and whenever caught, and he knows nothing of *quarter*. Just as a badger he ends his life, – his last struggle being an attempt to do injury to his assailant. This trait in his character has, no doubt, been strengthened by the inhuman treatment that, for a century, he has been receiving from the brutal boers of the colonial frontier.

The costume of the Bushman is of the most primitive character, – differing only from that worn by our first parents, in that the fig-leaf used by the men is a patch of jackal-skin, and that of the women a sort of fringe or bunch of leather thongs, suspended around the waist by a strap, and hanging down to the knees. It is in reality a little apron of dressed skin; or, to speak more accurately, two of them, one above the other, both cut into narrow strips or thongs, from below the waist downward. Other clothing than this they have none, if we except a little skin *kaross*, or cloak, which is worn over their shoulders; – that of the women being provided with a bag or hood at the top, that answers the naked “piccaninny” for a nest or cradle. Sandals protect their feet from the sharp stones, and these are of the rudest description, – merely a piece of the thick hide cut a little longer and broader than the soles of the feet, and fastened at the toes and round the ankles by thongs of sinews. An attempt at ornament is displayed in a leathern skullcap, or more commonly a circlet around the head, upon which are sewed a number of “cowries,” or small shells of the *Cyprea moneta*.

It is difficult to say where these shells are procured, – as they are not the product of the Bushman’s country, but are only found on the far shores of the Indian Ocean. Most probably he obtains them by barter, and after they have passed through many hands; but they must cost the Bushman dear, as he sets the highest value upon them. Other ornaments consist of old brass or copper buttons, attached to the little curls of his woolly hair; and, among the women, strings of little pieces of ostrich egg-shells, fashioned to resemble beads; besides a perfect load of leathern bracelets on the arms, and a like profusion of similar circlets on the limbs, often reaching from the knee to the ankle-joint.

Red ochre over the face and hair is the fashionable toilette, and a perfumery is obtained by rubbing the skin with the powdered leaves of the “buku” plant, a species of *diosma*. According to a quaint old writer, this causes them to “stink like a poppy,” and would be highly objectionable, were it not preferable to the odour which they have without it.

They do not *tattoo*, nor yet perforate the ears, lips, or nose, – practices so common among savage tribes. Some instances of nose-piercing have been observed, with the usual appendage of a

piece of wood or porcupine's quill inserted in the septum, but this is a custom rather of the Caffres than Bushmen. Among the latter it is rare. A grand ornament is obtained by smearing the face and head with a shining micaceous paste, which is procured from a cave in one particular part of the Bushman's range; but this, being a "far-fetched" article, is proportionably scarce and dear. It is only a fine belle who can afford to give herself a coat of *blink-slip*, – as this sparkling pigment is called by the colonists. Many of the women, and men as well, carry in their hands the bushy tail of a jackal. The purpose is to fan off the flies, and serve also as a "wipe," to disembarass their bodies of perspiration when the weather chances to be over hot.

The domicile of the Bushman next merits description. It is quite as simple and primitive as his dress, and gives him about equal trouble in its construction. If a cave or cleft can be found in the rocks, of sufficient capacity to admit his own body and those of his family – never a very large one – he builds no house. The cave contents him, be it ever so tight a squeeze. If there be no cave handy, an overhanging rock will answer equally as well. He regards not the open sides, nor the draughts. It is only the rain which he does not relish; and any sort of a shed, that will shelter him from that, will serve him for a dwelling. If neither cave, crevice, nor impending cliff can be found in the neighbourhood, he then resorts to the alternative of housebuilding; and his style of architecture does not differ greatly from that of the orang-outang. A bush is chosen that grows near to two or three others, – the branches of all meeting in a common centre. Of these branches the builder takes advantage, fastening them together at the ends, and wattling some into the others. Over this framework a quantity of grass is scattered in such a fashion as to cast off a good shower of rain, and then the "carcass" of the building is considered complete. The inside work remains yet to be done, and that is next set about. A large roundish or oblong hole is scraped out in the middle of the floor. It is made wide enough and deep enough to hold the bodies of three or four Bush-people, though a single large Caffre or Dutchman would scarcely find room in it. Into this hole is flung a quantity of dry grass, and arranged so as to present the appearance of a gigantic nest. This nest, or lair, becomes the bed of the Bushman, his wife, or wives, – for he frequently keeps two, – and the other members of his family. Coiled together like monkeys, and covered with their skin karosses, they all sleep in it, – whether "sweetly" or "soundly," I shall not take upon me to determine.

It is supposed to be this fashion of literally "sleeping in the bush," as also the mode by which he skulks and hides among bushes, – invariably taking to them when pursued, – that has given origin to the name Bushman, or *Bosjesman*, as it is in the language of the colonial Dutch. This derivation is probable enough, and no better has been offered.

The Bushman sometimes constructs himself a more elaborate dwelling; that is, some Bushmen; – for it should be remarked that there are a great many tribes or communities of these people, and they are not all so very low in the scale of civilisation. None, however, ever arrive at the building of a house, – not even a hut. A tent is their highest effort in the building line, and that is of the rudest description, scarce deserving the name. Its covering is a mat, which they weave out of a species of rush that grows along some of the desert streams; and in the fabrication of the covering they display far more ingenuity than in the planning or construction of the tent itself. The mat, in fact, is simply laid over two poles, that are bent into the form of an arch, by having both ends stuck into the ground. A second piece of matting closes up one end; and the other, left open, serves for the entrance. As a door is not deemed necessary, no further construction is required, and the tent is "pitched" complete. It only remains to scoop out the sand, and make the *nest* as already described.

It is said that the Goths drew their ideas of architecture from the aisles of the oak forest; the Chinese from their Mongolian tents; and the Egyptians from their caves in the rocks. Beyond a doubt, the Bushman has borrowed his from the nest of the ostrich!

It now becomes necessary to inquire how the Bushman spends his time? how he obtains subsistence? and what is the nature of his food? All these questions can be answered, though at first it may appear difficult to answer them. Dwelling, as he always does, in the very heart of the desert,

remote from forests that might furnish him with some sort of food – trees that might yield fruit, – far away from a fertile soil, with no knowledge of agriculture, even if it were near, – with no flocks or herds; neither sheep, cattle, horses, nor swine, – no domestic animals but his lean, diminutive dogs, – how does this Bushman procure enough to eat? What are his sources of supply?

We shall see. Being neither a grazier nor a farmer, he has other means of subsistence, – though it must be confessed that they are of a precarious character, and often during his life does the Bushman find himself on the very threshold of starvation. This, however, results less from the parsimony of Nature than the Bushman's own improvident habits, – a trait in his character which is, perhaps, more strongly developed in him than any other. We shall have occasion to refer to it presently.

His first and chief mode of procuring his food is by the chase: for, although he is surrounded by the sterile wilderness, he is not the only animated being who has chosen the desert for his home. Several species of birds – one the largest of all – and quadrupeds, share with the Bushman the solitude and safety of this desolate region. The rhinoceros can dwell there; and in numerous streams are found the huge hippopotami; whilst quaggas, zebras, and several species of antelope frequent the desert plains as their favourite “stamping” ground. Some of these animals can live almost without water; but when they do require it, what to them is a gallop of fifty miles to some well-known “vley” or pool? It will be seen, therefore, that the desert has its numerous denizens. All these are objects of the Bushman's pursuit, who follows them with incessant pertinacity – as if he were a beast of prey, furnished by Nature with the most carnivorous propensities.

In the capture of these animals he displays an almost incredible dexterity and cunning. His mode of approaching the sly ostrich, by disguising himself in the skin of one of these birds, is so well-known that I need not describe it here; but the *ruses* he adopts for capturing or killing other sorts of game are many of them equally ingenious. The pit-trap is one of his favourite contrivances; and this, too, has been often described, – but often very erroneously. The pit is not a large hollow, – as is usually asserted, – but rather of dimensions proportioned to the size of the animal that is expected to fall into it. For game like the rhinoceros or *eland* antelope, it is dug of six feet in length and three in width at the top; gradually narrowing to the bottom, where it ends in a trench of only twelve inches broad. Six or seven feet is considered deep enough; and the animal, once into it, gets so wedged at the narrow bottom part as to be unable to make use of its legs for the purpose of springing out again. Sometimes a sharp stake or two are used, with the view of *impaling* the victim; but this plan is not always adopted. There is not much danger of a quadruped that drops in ever getting out again, till he is dragged out by the Bushman in the shape of a carcass.

The Bushman's ingenuity does not end here. Besides the construction of the trap, it is necessary the game should be guided into it. Were this not done, the pit might remain a long time empty, and, as a necessary consequence, so too might the belly of the Bushman. In the wide plain few of the gregarious animals have a path which they follow habitually; only where there is a pool may such beaten trails be found, and of these the Bushman also avails himself; but they are not enough. Some artificial means must be used to make the traps pay – for they are not constructed without much labour and patience. The plan adopted by the Bushman to accomplish this exhibits some points of originality. He first chooses a part of the plain which lies between two mountains. No matter if these be distant from each other: a mile, or even two, will not deter the Bushman from his design. By the help of his whole tribe – men, women, and children – he constructs a fence from one mountain to the other. The material used is whatever may be most ready to the hand: stones, sods, brush, or dead timber, if this be convenient. No matter how rude the fence: it need not either be very high. He leaves several gaps in it; and the wild animals, however easily they might leap over such a puny barrier, will, in their ordinary way, prefer to walk leisurely through the gaps. In each of these, however, there is a dangerous hole – dangerous from its depth as well as from the cunning way in which it is concealed from the view – in short, in each gap there is a *pit-fall*. No one – at least no animal except the elephant – would ever suspect its presence; the grass seems to grow over it, and the sand lies unturned, just as

elsewhere upon the plain. What quadruped could detect the cheat? Not any one except the sagacious elephant. The stupid eland tumbles through; the gemsbok goes under; and the rhinoceros rushes into it as if destined to destruction. The Bushman sees this from his elevated perch, glides forward over the ground, and spears the struggling victim with his *poisoned assagai*.

Besides the above method of capturing game the Bushman also uses the bow and arrows. This is a weapon in which he is greatly skilled; and although both bow and arrows are as tiny as if intended for children's toys, they are among the deadliest of weapons, their fatal effect lies not in the *size* of the wound they are capable of inflicting, but in the peculiar mode in which the barbs of the arrows are prepared. I need hardly add that they are dipped in poison; – for who has not heard of the poisoned arrows of the African Bushmen?

Both bow and arrows are usually rude enough in their construction, and would appear but a trumpery affair, were it not for a knowledge of their effects. The bow is a mere round stick, about three feet long, and slightly bent by means of its string of twisted sinews. The arrows are mere reeds, tipped with pieces of bone, with a split ostrich-quill lapped behind the head, and answering for a barb. This arrow the Bushman can shoot with tolerable certainty to a distance of a hundred yards, and he can even project it farther by giving a slight elevation to his aim. It signifies not whether the force with which it strikes the object be ever so slight, if it only makes an entrance. Even a scratch from its point will sometimes prove fatal.

Of course the danger dwells altogether in the poison. Were it not for that, the Bushman, from his dwarfish stature and pigmy strength, would be a harmless creature indeed.

The poison he well knows how to prepare, and he can make it of the most “potent spell,” when the “materials” are within his reach. For this purpose he makes use of both vegetable and animal substances, and a mineral is also employed; but the last is not a poison, and is only used to give consistency to the liquid, so that it may the better adhere to the arrow. The vegetable substances are of various kinds. Some are botanically known: the bulb of *Amaryllis disticha*, – the gum of a *Euphorbia*, – the sap of a species of sumac (*Rhus*), – and the nuts of a shrubby plant, by the colonists called *Woolf-gift* (Wolf-poison).

The animal substance is the fluid found in the fangs of venomous serpents, several species of which serve the purpose of the Bushman: as the little “Horned Snake,” – so called from the scales rising prominently over its eyes; the “Yellow Snake,” or South-African Cobra (*Naga haje*); the “Puff Adder,” and others. From all these he obtains the ingredients of his deadly ointment, and mixes them, not all together; for he cannot always procure them all in any one region of the country in which he dwells. He makes his poison, also, of different degrees of potency, according to the purpose for which he intends it; whether for hunting or war. With sixty or seventy little arrows, well imbued with this fatal mixture, and carefully placed in his quiver of tree bark or skin, – or, what is not uncommon, stuck like a coronet around his head, – he sallies forth, ready to deal destruction either to game, animals, or to human enemies.

Of these last he has no lack. Every man, not a Bushman, he deems his enemy; and he has some reason for thinking so. Truly may it be said of him, as of Ishmael, that his “hand is against every man, and every man's hand against him;” and such has been his unhappy history for ages. Not alone have the boers been his pursuers and oppressors, but all others upon his borders who are strong enough to attack him, – colonists, Caffres, and Bechuanas, all alike, – not even excepting his supposed kindred, the Hottentots. Not only does no fellow-feeling exist between Bushman and Hottentot, but, strange to say, they hate each other with the most rancorous hatred. The Bushman will plunder a Namaqua Hottentot, a Griqua, or a Gonaqua, – plunder and murder him with as much ruthlessness, or even more, than he would the hated Caffre or boer. All are alike his enemies, – all to be plundered and massacred, whenever met, and the thing appears possible.

We are speaking of plunder. This is another source of supply to the Bushman, though one that is not always to be depended upon. It is his most dangerous method of obtaining a livelihood, and

often costs him his life. He only resorts to it when all other resources fail him, and food is no longer to be obtained by the chase.

He makes an expedition into the settlements, – either of the frontier boers, Caffres, or Hottentots, – whichever chance to live most convenient to his haunts. The expedition, of course, is by night, and conducted, not as an open *foray*, but in secret, and by stealth. The cattle are *stolen*, not *reeved*, and driven off while the owner and his people are asleep.

In the morning, or as soon as the loss is discovered, a pursuit is at once set on foot. A dozen men, mounted and armed with long muskets (*röers*), take the *spoor* of the spoilers, and follow it as fast as their horses will *carry* them. A dozen boers, or even half that number, is considered a match for a whole tribe of Bushmen, in any fight which may occur in the open plain, as the boers make use of their long-range guns at such a distance that the Bushmen are shot down without being able to use their poisoned arrows; and if the thieves have the fortune to be overtaken before they have got far into the desert, they stand a good chance of being terribly chastised.

There is no quarter shown them. Such a thing as mercy is never dreamt of, – no sparing of lives any more than if they were a pack of hyenas. The Bushmen may escape to the rocks, such of them as are not hit by the bullets; and there the boers know it would be idle to follow them. Like the klipspringer antelope, the little savages can bound from rock to rock, and cliff to cliff, or hide like partridges among crevices, where neither man nor horse can pursue them. Even upon the level plain – if it chance to be stony or intersected with breaks and ravines – a horseman would endeavour to overtake them in vain, for these yellowimps are as swift as ostriches.

When the spoilers scatter thus, the boer may recover his cattle, but in what condition? That he has surmised already, without going among the herd. He does not expect to drive home one half of them; perhaps not one head. On reaching the flock he finds there is not one without a wound of some kind or other: a gash in the flank, the cut of a knife, the stab of an assagai, or a poisoned arrow – intended for the boer himself – sticking between the ribs. This is the sad spectacle that meets his eyes; but he never reflects that it is the result of his own cruelty, – he never regards it in the light of retribution. Had he not first hunted the Bushman to make him a slave, to make bondsmen and bondswomen of his sons and daughters, to submit them to the caprice and tyranny of his great, strapping *frau*, perhaps his cattle would have been browsing quietly in his fields. The poor Bushman, in attempting to take them, followed but his instincts of hunger: in yielding them up he obeyed but the promptings of revenge.

It is not always that the Bushman is thus overtaken. He frequently succeeds in carrying the whole herd to his desert fastness; and the skill which he exhibits in getting them there is perfectly surprising. The cattle themselves are more afraid of him than of a wild beast, and run at his approach; but the Bushman, swifter than they, can glide all around them, and keep them moving at a rapid rate.

He uses stratagem also to obstruct or baffle the pursuit. The route he takes is through the driest part of the desert, – if possible, where water does not exist at all. The cattle suffer from thirst, and bellow from the pain; but the Bushman cares not for that, so long as he is himself served. But how is he served? There is no water, and a Bushman can no more go without drinking than a boer: how then does he provide for himself on these long expeditions?

All has been pre-arranged. While off to the settlements, the Bushman's wife has been busy. The whole *kraal* of women – young and old – have made an excursion halfway across the desert, each carrying ostrich egg-shells, as much as her kaross will hold, each shell full of water. These have been deposited at intervals along the route in secret spots known by marks to the Bushmen, and this accomplished the women return home again. In this way the plunderer obtains his supply of water, and thus is he enabled to continue his journey over the arid *Karoo*.

The pursuers become appalled. They are suffering from thirst – their horses sinking under them. Perhaps they have lost their way? It would be madness to proceed further. “Let the cattle go

this time?” and with this disheartening reflection they give up the pursuit, turn the heads of their horses, and ride homeward.

There is a feast at the Bushman’s kraal – and such a feast! not *one* ox is slaughtered, but a score of them all at once. They kill them, as if from very wantonness; and they no longer eat, but raven on the flesh.

For days the feasting is kept up almost continuously, – even at night they must wake up to have a midnight meal! and thus runs the tale, till every ox has been eaten. They have not the slightest idea of a provision for the future; even the lower animals seem wiser in this respect. They do not think of keeping a few of the plundered cattle at pasture to serve them for a subsequent occasion. They give the poor brutes neither food nor drink; but, having penned them up in some defile of the rocks, leave them to moan and bellow, to drop down and die.

On goes the feasting, till all are finished; and even if the flesh has turned putrid, this forms not the slightest objection: it is eaten all the same.

The kraal now exhibits an altered spectacle. The starved, meagre wretches, who were seen flitting among its tents but a week ago, have all disappeared. Plump bodies and distended abdomens are the order of the day; and the profile of the Bushwoman, taken from the neck to the knees, now exhibits the outline of the letter S. The little imps leap about, tearing raw flesh, – their yellow cheeks besmeared with blood, – and the lean curs seem to have been exchanged for a pack of fat, petted poodles.

But this scene must some time come to an end, and at length it does end. All the flesh is exhausted, and the bones picked clean. A complete reaction comes over the spirit of the Bushman. He falls into a state of languor, – the only time when he knows such a feeling, – and he keeps his kraal, and remains idle for days. Often he sleeps for twenty-four hours at a time, and wakes only to go to sleep again. He need not rouse himself with the idea of getting something to eat: there is not a morsel in the whole kraal, and he knows it. He lies still, therefore, – weakened with hunger, and overcome with the drowsiness of a terrible lassitude.

Fortunate for him, while in this state, if those bold vultures – attracted by the *débris* of his feast, and now high wheeling in the air – be not perceived from afar; fortunate if they do not discover the whereabouts of his kraal to the vengeful pursuer. If they should do so, he has made his last foray and his last feast.

When the absolute danger of starvation at length compels our Bushman to bestir himself, he seems to recover a little of his energy, and once more takes to hunting, or, if near a stream, endeavours to catch a few fish. Should both these resources fail, he has another, – without which he would most certainly starve, – and perhaps this may be considered his most important source of supply, since it is the most constant, and can be depended on at nearly all seasons of the year. Weakened with hunger, then, and scarce equal to any severer labour, he goes *out hunting – this time insects, not quadrupeds*. With a stout stick inserted into a stone at one end and pointed at the other, he proceeds to the nests of the white ants (*termites*), and using the point of the stick, – the stone serving by its weight to aid the force of the blow, – he breaks open the hard, gummy clay of which the hillock is formed. Unless the *aard-vark* and the *pangolin* – two very different kinds of ant-eaters – have been there before him, he finds the chambers filled with the eggs of the ants, the insects themselves, and perhaps large quantities of their *larvae*. All are equally secured by the Bushman, and either devoured on the spot, or collected into a skin bag, and carried back to his kraal.

He hunts also another species of ants that do not build nests or “hillocks,” but bring forth their young in hollows under the ground. These make long galleries or covered ways just under the surface, and at certain periods – which the Bushman knows by unmistakable signs – they become very active, and traverse these underground galleries in thousands. If the passages were to be opened above, the ants would soon make off to their caves, and but a very few could be captured. The Bushman, knowing this, adopts a stratagem. With the stick already mentioned he pierces holes of a good depth down;

and works the stick about, until the sides of the holes are smooth and even. These he intends shall serve him as pitfalls; and they are therefore made in the covered ways along which the insects are passing. The result is, that the little creatures, not suspecting the existence of these deep wells, tumble head foremost into them, and are unable to mount up the steep smooth sides again, so that in a few minutes the hole will be filled with ants, which the Bushman scoops out at his leisure.

Another source of supply which he has, and also a pretty constant one, consists of various roots of the tuberous kind, but more especially bulbous roots, which grow in the desert. They are several species of *Ixias* and *Mesembryanthemums*, – some of them producing bulbs of a large size, and deeply buried underground. Half the Bushman's and Bushwoman's time is occupied in digging for these roots; and the spade employed is the stone-headed staff already described.

Ostrich eggs also furnish the Bushman with many a meal; and the huge shells of these eggs serve him for water-vessels, cups, and dishes. He is exceedingly expert in tracking up the ostrich, and discovering its nest. Sometimes he finds a nest in the absence of the birds; and in a case of this kind he pursues a course of conduct that is *peculiarly Bushman*. Having removed all the eggs to a distance, and concealed them under some bush, he returns to the nest and ensconces himself in it. His diminutive body, when close squatted, cannot be perceived from a distance, especially when there are a few bushes around the nest, as there usually are. Thus concealed he awaits the return of the birds, holding his bow and poisoned arrows ready to salute them as soon as they come within range. By this *ruse* he is almost certain of killing either the cock or hen, and not infrequently both – when they do not return together.

Lizards and land-tortoises often furnish the Bushman with a meal; and the shell of the latter serves him also for a dish; but his period of greatest plenty is when the locusts *appear*. Then, indeed, the Bushman is no longer in want of a meal; and while these creatures remain with him, he knows no hunger. He grows fat in a trice, and his curs keep pace with him – for they too greedily devour the locusts. Were the locusts a constant, or even an annual visitor, the Bushman would be a rich man – at all events his wants would be amply supplied. Unfortunately for him, but fortunately for everybody else, these terrible destroyers of vegetation only come now and then – several years often intervening between their visits.

The Bushmen have no religion whatever; no form of marriage – any more than mating together like wild beasts; but they appear to have some respect for the memory of their dead, since they bury them – usually erecting a large pile of stones, or “cairn,” over the body.

They are far from being of a melancholy mood. Though crouching in their dens and caves during the day, in dread of the boers and other enemies, they come forth at night to chatter and make merry. During fine moonlights they dance all night, keeping up the *ball* till morning; and in their kraals may be seen a circular spot – beaten hard and smooth with their feet – where these dances are performed.

They have no form of government – not so much as a head man or chief. Even the father of the family possesses no authority, except such as superior strength may give him; and when his sons are grown up and become as strong as he is, this of course also ceases.

They have no tribal organisation; the small communities in which they live being merely so many individuals accidentally brought together, often quarrelling and separating from one another. These communities rarely number over a hundred individuals, since, from the nature of their country, a large number could not find subsistence in any one place. It follows, therefore, that the Bushman race must ever remain widely scattered – so long as they pursue their present mode of life – and no influence has ever been able to win them from it. Missionary efforts made among them have all proved fruitless. The desert seems to have been created for them, as they for the desert; and when transferred elsewhere, to dwell amidst scenes of civilised life, they always yearn to return to their wilderness home.

Truly are these pigmy savages an odd people!

## Chapter Two. The Amazonian Indians

In glancing at the map of the American continent, we are struck by a remarkable analogy between the geographical features of its two great divisions – the North and the South, – an analogy amounting almost to a symmetrical parallelism.

Each has its “mighty” mountains – the *Cordilleras of the Andes* in the south, and the *Cordilleras of the Sierra Madre* (Rocky Mountains) in the north – with all the varieties of volcano and eternal snow. Each has its secondary chain: in the north, the *Nevadas* of California and Oregon; in the south, the *Sierras* of Caraccas and the group of Guiana; and, if you wish to render the parallelism complete, descend to a lower elevation, and set the Alleghanies of the United States against the mountains of Brazil – both alike detached from all the others.

In the comparison we have exhausted the mountain chains of both divisions of the continent. If we proceed further, and carry it into minute detail, we shall find the same correspondence – ridge for ridge, chain for chain, peak for peak; – in short, a most singular equilibrium, as if there had been a design that one half of this great continent should balance the other!

From the mountains let us proceed to the rivers, and see how *they* will correspond. Here, again, we discover a like parallelism, amounting almost to a rivalry. Each continent (for it is proper to style them so) contains the largest river in the world. If we make *length* the standard, the north claims precedence for the Mississippi; if *volume of water* is to be the criterion, the south is entitled to it upon the merits of the Amazon. Each, too, has its numerous branches, spreading into a mighty “tree”; and these, either singly or combined, form a curious equipoise both in length and magnitude. We have only time to set list against list, tributaries of the great northern river against tributaries of its great southern compeer, – the Ohio and Illinois, the Yellowstone and Platte, the Kansas and Osage, the Arkansas and Red, against the Madeira and Purus, the Ucayali and Huallaga, the Japura and Negro, the Xingu and Tapajos.

Of other river systems, the Saint Lawrence may be placed against the La Plata, the Oregon against the Orinoco, the Mackenzie against the Magdalena, and the Rio Bravo del Norte against the Tocantins; while the two Colorados – the Brazos and Alabama – find their respective rivals in the Essequibo, the Paranahybo, the Pedro, and the Patagonian Negro; and the San Francisco of California, flowing over sands of gold, is balanced by its homonyme of Brazil, that has its origin in the land of diamonds. To an endless list might the comparison be carried.

We pass to the plains. *Prairies* in the north, *llanos* and *pampas* in the south, almost identical in character. *Of the plateaux* or tablelands, those of Mexico, La Puebla, Perote, and silver Potosi in the north; those of Quito, Bogota, Cusco, and gold Potosi in the south; of the desert plains, Utah and the Llano Estacado against Atacama and the deserts of Patagonia. Even the Great Salt Lake has its parallel in Titicaca; while the “Salinas” of New Mexico and the upland prairies, are represented by similar deposits in the Gran Chaco and the Pampas.

We arrive finally at the forests. Though unlike in other respects, we have here also a rivalry in magnitude, – between the vast timbered expanse stretching from Arkansas to the Atlantic shores, and that which covers the valley of the Amazon. These *were* the two greatest forests on the face of the earth. I say *were*, for one of them no longer exists; at least, it is no longer a continuous tract, but a collection of forests, opened by the axe, and intersected by the clearings of the colonist. The other still stands in all its virgin beauty and primeval vigour, untouched by the axe, undefiled by fire, its path scarce trodden by human feet, its silent depths to this hour unexplored.

It is with this forest and its denizens we have to do. Here then let us terminate the catalogue of similitudes, and concentrate our attention upon the particular subject of our sketch.

The whole *valley* of the Amazon – in other words, the tract watered by this great river and its tributaries – may be described as one unbroken forest. We now know the borders of this forest with considerable exactness, but to trace them here would require a too lengthened detail. Suffice it to say, that lengthwise it extends from the mouth of the Amazon to the foothills of the Peruvian Andes, a distance of 2,500 miles. In breadth it varies, beginning on the Atlantic coast with a breadth of 400 miles, which widens towards the central part of the continent till it attains to 1,500, and again narrowing to about 1,000, where it touches the eastern slope of the Andes.

That form of leaf known to botanists as “obovate” will give a good idea of the figure of the great Amazon forest, supposing the small end or shank to rest on the Atlantic, and the broad end to extend along the semicircular concavity of the Andes, from Bolivia on the south to New Granada on the north. In all this vast expanse of territory there is scarce an acre of open ground, if we except the water-surface of the rivers and their bordering “lagoons,” which, were they to bear their due proportions on a map, could scarce be represented by the narrowest lines, or the most inconspicuous dots. The grass plains which embay the forest on its southern edge along the banks of some of its Brazilian tributaries, or those which proceed like spurs from the Llanos of Venezuela, do not in any place approach the Amazon itself, and there are many points on the great river which may be taken as centres, and around which circles may be drawn, having diameters 1,000 miles in length, the circumferences of which will enclose nothing but timbered land. The main stream of the Amazon, though it intersects this grand forest, does not *bisect* it, speaking with mathematical precision. There is rather more timbered surface to the southward than that which extends northward, though the inequality of the two divisions is not great. It would not be much of an error to say that the Amazon river cuts the forest in halves. At its mouth, however, this would not apply; since for the first 300 miles above the embouchure of the river, the country on the northern side is destitute of timber. This is occasioned by the projecting spurs of the Guiana mountains, which on that side approach the Amazon in the shape of naked ridges and grass-covered hills and plains.

It is not necessary to say that the great forest of the Amazon is a tropical one – since the river itself, throughout its whole course, almost traces the line of the equator. Its vegetation, therefore, is emphatically of a tropical character; and in this respect it differs essentially from that of North America, or rather, we should say, of Canada and the United States. It is necessary to make this limitation, because the forests of the tropical parts of North America, including the West-Indian islands, present a great similitude to that of the Amazon. It is not only in the genera and species of trees that the *sylva* of the temperate zone differs from that of the torrid; but there is a very remarkable difference in the distribution of these genera and species. In a great forest of the north, it is not uncommon to find a large tract covered with a single species of trees, – as with pines, oaks, poplars, or the red cedar (*Juniperus Virginiana*). This arrangement is rather the rule than the exception; whereas, in the tropical forest, the rule is reversed, except in the case of two or three species of palms (*Mauritia* and *Euterpe*), which sometimes exclusively cover large tracts of surface. Of other trees, it is rare to find even a clump or grove standing together – often only two or three trees, and still more frequently, a single individual is observed, separated from those of its own kind by hundreds of others, all differing in order, genus, and species. I note this peculiarity of the tropic forest, because it exercises, as may easily be imagined, a direct influence upon the economy of its human occupants – whether these be savage or civilised. Even the habits of the lower animals – beasts and birds – are subject to a similar influence.

It would be out of place here to enumerate the different kinds of trees that compose this mighty wood, – a bare catalogue of their names would alone fill many pages, – and it would be safe to say that if the list were given as now known to botanists, it would comprise scarce half the species that actually exist in the valley of the Amazon. In real truth, this vast Garden of God is yet unexplored by man. Its border walks and edges have alone been examined; and the enthusiastic botanist need not fear that he is too late in the field. A hundred years will elapse before this grand *parterre* can be exhausted.

At present, a thorough examination of the botany of the Amazon valley would be difficult, if not altogether impossible, even though conducted on a grand and expensive scale. There are several reasons for this. Its woods are in many places absolutely impenetrable – on account either of the thick tangled undergrowth, or from the damp, spongy nature of the soil. There are no roads that could be traversed by horse or man; and the few paths are known only to the wild savage, – not always passable even by him. Travelling can only be done by water, either upon the great rivers, or by the narrow creeks (igaripes) or lagoons; and a journey performed in this fashion must needs be both tedious and indirect, allowing but a limited opportunity for observation. Horses can scarce be said to exist in the country, and cattle are equally rare – a few only are found in one or two of the large Portuguese settlements on the main river – and the jaguars and blood-sucking bats offer a direct impediment to their increase. Contrary to the general belief, the tropical forest is not the home of the larger mammalia: it is not their proper *habitat*, nor are they found in it. In the Amazon forest but few species exist, and these not numerous in individuals. There are no vast herds – as of buffaloes on the prairies of North America, or of antelopes in Africa. The tapir alone attains to any considerable size, – exceeding that of the ass, – but its numbers are few. Three or four species of small deer represent the ruminants, and the hog of the Amazon is the peccary. Of these there are at least three species. Where the forest impinges on the mountain regions of Peru, bears are found of at least two kinds, but not on the lower plains of the great “Montaña,” – for by this general designation is the vast expanse of the Amazon country known among the Peruvian people. “Montes” and “montañas,” literally signifying “mountains,” are not so understood among Spanish Americans. With them the “montes” and “montanas” are tracts of forest-covered country, and that of the Amazon valley is the “Montana” *par excellence*.

Sloths of several species, and opossums of still greater variety, are found all over the Montana, but both thinly distributed as regards the number of individuals. A similar remark applies to the ant-eaters or “ant-bears,” of which there are four kinds, – to the armadillos, the “agoutis,” and the “cavies,” one of which last, the *capibara*, is the largest rodent upon earth. This, with its kindred genus, the “paca,” is not so rare in individual numbers, but, on the contrary, appears in large herds upon the borders of the rivers and lagoons. A porcupine, several species of spinous rats, an otter, two or three kinds of badger-like animals (the *potto* and *coatis*), a “honey-bear” (*Galera barbara*), and a fox, or wild dog, are widely distributed throughout the Montana.

Everywhere exists the jaguar, both the black and spotted varieties, and the puma has there his lurking-place. Smaller cats, both spotted and striped, are numerous in species, and squirrels of several kinds, with bats, complete the list of the terrestrial mammalia.

Of all the lower animals, monkeys are the most common, for to them the Montana is a congenial home. They abound not only in species, but in the number of individuals, and their ubiquitous presence contributes to enliven the woods. At least thirty different kinds of them exist in the Amazon valley, from the “coatas,” and other howlers as large as baboons, to the tiny little “ouistitis” and “säimiris,” not bigger than squirrels or rats.

While we must admit a paucity in the species of the quadrupeds of the Amazon, the same remark does not apply to the birds. In the ornithological department of natural history, a fulness and richness here exist, perhaps not equalled elsewhere. The most singular and graceful forms, combined with the most brilliant plumage, are everywhere presented to the eye, in the parrots and great macaws, the toucans, trogons, and tanagers, the *shrikes*, humming-birds, and orioles; and even in the vultures and eagles: for here are found the most beautiful of predatory birds, – the king vulture and the harpy eagle. Of the feathered creatures existing in the valleys of the Amazon there are not less than one thousand different species, of which only one half have yet been caught or described.

Reptiles are equally abundant – the serpent family being represented by numerous species, from the great water boa (*anaconda*), of ten yards in length, to the tiny and beautiful but venomous *lachesis*, or coral snake, not thicker than the shank of a tobacco-pipe. The lizards range through a

like gradation, beginning with the huge “jacare,” or crocodile, of several species, and ending with the turquoise-blue *anolius*, not bigger than a newt.

The waters too are rich in species of their peculiar inhabitants – of which the most remarkable and valuable are the *manatees* (two or three species), the great and smaller turtles, the porpoises of various kinds, and an endless catalogue of the finny tribes that frequent the rivers of the tropics. It is mainly from this source, and not from four-footed creatures of the forest, that the human denizen of the great Montana draws his supply of food, – at least that portion of it which may be termed the “meaty.” Were it not for the *manatee*, the great porpoise, and other large fish, he would often have to “eat his bread dry.”

And now it is *his* turn to be “talked about.” I need not inform you that the aborigines who inhabit the valley of the Amazon, are all of the so-called *Indian* race – though there are so many, distinct tribes of them that almost every river of any considerable magnitude has a tribe of its own. In some cases a number of these tribes belong to one *nationality*; that is, several of them may be found speaking nearly the same language, though living apart from each other; and of these larger divisions or nationalities there are several occupying the different districts of the Montana. The tribes even of the same nationality do not always present a uniform appearance. There are darker and fairer tribes; some in which the average standard of height is less than among Europeans; and others where it equals or exceeds this. There are tribes again where both men and women are ill-shaped and ill-favoured – though these are few – and other tribes where both sexes exhibit a considerable degree of personal beauty. Some tribes are even distinguished for their good looks, the men presenting models of manly form, while the women are equally attractive by the regularity of their features, and the graceful modesty of expression that adorns them.

A minute detail of the many peculiarities in which the numerous tribes of the Amazon differ from one another would fill a large volume; and in a sketch like the present, which is meant to include them all, it would not be possible to give such a detail. Nor indeed would it serve any good purpose; for although there are many points of difference between the different tribes, yet these are generally of slight importance, and are far more than counterbalanced by the multitude of resemblances. So numerous are these last, as to create a strong *idiosyncrasy* in the tribes of the Amazon, which not only entitles them to be classed together in an ethnological point of view, but which separates them from all the other Indians of America. Of course, the non-possession of the horse – they do not even know the animal – at once broadly distinguishes them from the Horse Indians, both of the Northern and Southern divisions of the continent.

It would be idle here to discuss the question as to whether the Amazonian Indians have all a common origin. It is evident they have not. We know that many of them are from Peru and Bogota – runaways from Spanish oppression. We know that others migrated from the south – equally fugitives from the still more brutal and barbarous domination of the Portuguese. And still others were true aboriginals of the soil, or if emigrants, when and whence came they? An idle question, never to be satisfactorily answered. There they now are, and *as they are* only shall we here consider them.

Notwithstanding the different sources whence they sprang, we find them, as I have already said, stamped with a certain *idiosyncrasy*, the result, no doubt, of the like circumstances which surround them. One or two tribes alone, whose habits are somewhat “odder” than the rest, have been treated to a separate chapter; but for the others, whatever is said of one, will, with very slight alteration, stand good for the whole of the Amazonian tribes. Let it be understood that we are discoursing only of those known as the “Indios bravos,” the fierce, brave, savage, or wild Indians – as you may choose to translate the phrase, – a phrase used throughout all Spanish America to distinguish those tribes, or sections of tribes, who refused obedience to Spanish tyranny, and who preserve to this hour their native independence and freedom. In contradistinction to the “Indios bravos” are the “Indios mansos,” or “tame Indians,” who submitted tamely both to the cross and sword, and now enjoy a rude demi-semi-civilisation, under the joint protectorate of priests and soldiers. Between these two kinds of

American aborigines, there is as much difference as between a lord and his serf – the true savage representing the former and the demi-semi-civilised savage approximating more nearly to the latter. The meddling monk has made a complete failure of it. His ends were purely political, and the result has proved ruinous to all concerned; – instead of civilising the savage, he has positively demoralised him.

It is not of his neophytes, the “Indios mansos,” we are now writing, but of the “infidels,” who would not hearken to his voice or listen to his teachings – those who could never be brought within “sound of the bell.”

Both “kinds” dwell within the valley of the Amazon, but in different places. The “Indios mansos” may be found along the banks of the main stream, from its source to its mouth – but more especially on its upper waters, where it runs through Spanish (Peruvian) territory. There they dwell in little villages or collections of huts, ruled by the missionary monk with iron rod, and performing for him all the offices of the menial slave. Their resources are few, not even equalling those of their wild but independent brethren; and their customs and religion exhibit a ludicrous *mélange* of savagery and civilisation. Farther down the river, the “Indio manso” is a “tapuio,” a hireling of the Portuguese, or to speak more correctly, a *slave*; for the latter treats him as such, considers him as such, and though there is a law against it, often drags him from his forest-home and keeps him in life-long bondage. Any human law would be a dead letter among such white-skins as are to be encountered upon the banks of the Amazon. Fortunately they are but few; a town or two on the lower Amazon and Rio Negro, – some wretched villages between, – scattered *estancias* along the banks – with here and there a paltry post of “militarios,” dignified by the name of a “fort:” these alone speak the progress of the Portuguese civilisation throughout a period of three centuries!

From all these settlements the wild Indian keeps away. He is never found near them – he is never seen by travellers, not even by the settlers. You may descend the mighty Amazon from its source to its mouth, and not once set your eyes upon the true son of the forest – the “Indio bravo.” Coming in contact only with the neophyte of the Spanish missionary, and the skulking *tapuio* of the Portuguese trader, you might bring away a very erroneous impression of the character of an Amazonian Indian.

Where is he to be seen? where dwells he? what like is his home? what sort of a house does he build? His costume? his arms? his occupation? his habits? These are the questions you would put. They shall all be answered, but briefly as possible – since our limited space requires brevity.

The wild Indian, then, is not to be found upon the Amazon itself, though there are long reaches of the river where he is free to roam – hundreds of miles without either town or *estancia*. He hunts, and occasionally fishes by the great water, but does not there make his dwelling – though in days gone by, its shores were his favourite place of residence. These were before the time when Orellana floated down past the door of his “malocca” – before that dark hour when the Brazilian slave-hunter found his way into the waters of the mighty *Solimoes*. This last event was the cause of his disappearance. It drove him from the shores of his beloved river-sea; forced him to withdraw his dwelling from observation, and rebuild it far up, on those tributaries where he might live a more peaceful life, secure from the trafficker in human flesh. Hence it is that the home of the Amazonian Indian is now to be sought for – not on the Amazon itself, but on its tributary streams – on the “canos” and “igaripes,” the canals and lagoons that, with a labyrinthine ramification, intersect the mighty forest of the Montana. Here dwells he, and here is he to be seen by any one bold enough to visit him in his fastness home.

How is he domiciled? Is there anything peculiar about the style of his house or his village?

Eminently peculiar; for in this respect he differs from all the other savage people of whom we have yet written, or of whom we may have occasion to write.

Let us proceed at once to describe his dwelling. It is not a tent, nor is it a hut, nor a cabin, nor a cottage, nor yet a cave! His dwelling can hardly be termed a house, nor his village a collection of houses – since both house and village are one and the same, and both are so peculiar, that we have no name for such a structure in civilised lands, unless we should call it a “barrack.” But even this

appellation would give but an erroneous idea of the Amazonian dwelling; and therefore we shall use that by which it is known in the “Lingoa geral,” and call it a *malocca*.

By such name is his house (or village rather) known among the *tapuios* and traders of the Amazon. Since it is both house and village at the same time, it must needs be a large structure; and so is it, large enough to contain the whole tribe – or at least the section of it that has chosen one particular spot for their residence. It is the property of the whole community, built by the labour of all, and used as their common dwelling – though each family has its own section specially set apart for itself. It will thus be seen that the Amazonian savage is, to some extent, a disciple of the Socialist school.

I have not space to enter into a minute account of the architecture of the *malocca*. Suffice it to say, that it is an immense temple-like building, raised upon timber uprights, so smooth and straight as to resemble columns. The beams and rafters are also straight and smooth, and are held in their places by “sipos” (tough creeping plants), which are whipped around the joints with a neatness and compactness equal to that used in the rigging of a ship. The roof is a thatch of palm-leaves, laid on with great regularity, and brought very low down at the eaves, so as to give to the whole structure the appearance of a gigantic beehive. The walls are built of split palms or bamboos, placed so closely together as to be impervious to either bullet or arrows.

The plan is a parallelogram, with a semicircle at one end; and the building is large enough to accommodate the whole community, often numbering more than a hundred individuals. On grand festive occasions several neighbouring communities can find room enough in it – even for dancing – and three or four hundred individuals not unfrequently assemble under the roof of a single *malocca*.

Inside the arrangements are curious. There is a wide hall or avenue in the middle – that extends from end to end throughout the whole length of the parallelogram – and on both sides of the hall is a row of partitions, separated from each other by split palms or canes, closely placed. Each of these sections is the abode of a family, and the place of deposit for the hammocks, clay pots, calabash-cups, dishes, baskets, weapons, and ornaments, which are the private property of each. The hall is used for the larger cooking utensils – such as the great clay ovens and pans for baking the cassava, and boiling the *caxire* or *chicha*. This is also a neutral ground, where the children play, and where the dancing is done on the occasion of grand “balls” and other ceremonial festivals.

The common doorway is in the gable end, and is six feet wide by ten in height. It remains open during the day, but is closed at night by a mat of palm fibre suspended from the top. There is another and smaller doorway at the semicircular end; but this is for the private use of the chief, who appropriates the whole section of the semicircle to himself and his family.

Of course the above is only the general outline of a *malocca*. A more particular description would not answer for that of all the tribes of the Amazon. Among different communities, and in different parts of the Montaña, the *malocca* varies in size, shape, and the materials of which it is built; and there are some tribes who live in separate huts. These exceptions, however, are few, and as a general thing, that above described is the style of habitation throughout the whole Montaña, from the confines of Peru to the shores of the Atlantic. North and south we encounter this singular house-village, from the headwaters of the Rio Negro to the highlands of Brazil.

Most of the Amazonian tribes follow agriculture, and understood the art of tillage before the coming of the Spaniards. They practise it, however, to a very limited extent. They cultivate a little manioc, and know how to manufacture it into *farinha* or *cassava* bread. They plant the *musaceae* and yam, and understand the distillation of various drinks, both from the plantain and several kinds of palms. They can make pottery from clay, – shaping it into various forms, neither rude nor inelegant, – and from the trees and parasitical twiners that surround their dwellings, they manufacture an endless variety of neat implements and utensils.

Their canoes are hollow trunks of trees sufficiently well-shaped, and admirably adapted to their mode of travelling – which is almost exclusively by water, by the numerous *canos* and *igaripes*, which are the roads and paths of their country – often as narrow and intricate as paths by land.

The Indians of the tropic forest dress in the very lightest costume. Of course each tribe has its own fashion; but a mere belt of cotton cloth, or the inner bark of a tree, passed round the waist and between the limbs, is all the covering they care for. It is the *guayuco*. Some wear a skirt of tree bark, and, on grand occasions, feather tunics are seen, and also plume head-dresses, made of the brilliant wing and tail feathers of parrots and macaws. Circlets of these also adorn the arms and limbs. All the tribes paint, using the *anotto*, *caruto*, and several other dyes which they obtain from various kinds of trees, elsewhere more particularly described.

There are one or two tribes who *tattoo* their skins; but this strange practice is far less common among the American Indians than with the natives of the Pacific isles.

In the manufacture of their various household utensils and implements, as well as their weapons for war and the chase, many tribes of Amazonian Indians display an ingenuity that would do credit to the most accomplished artisans. The hammocks made by them have been admired everywhere; and it is from the valley of the Amazon that most of these are obtained, so much prized in the cities of Spanish and Portuguese America. They are the special manufacture of the women, the men only employing their mechanical skill on their weapons:

The hammock, “rede,” or “maqueira,” is manufactured out of strings obtained from the young leaves of several species of palms. The *astrocaryum*, or “tucum” palm furnishes this cordage, but a still better quality is obtained from the “miriti” (*Mauritia flexuosa*). The unopened leaf, which forms a thick-pointed column growing up out of the crown of the tree, is cut off at the base, and this being pulled apart, is shaken dexterously until the tender leaflets fall out. These being stripped of their outer covering, leave behind a thin tissue of a pale-yellowish colour, which is the fibre for making the cordage. After being tied in bundles this fibre is left awhile to dry, and is then twisted by being rolled between the hand and the hip or thigh. The women perform this process with great dexterity. Taking two strands of fibre between the forefinger and thumb of the left hand, they lay them separated a little along the thigh; a roll downward gives them a twist, and then being adroitly brought together, a roll upwards completes the making of the cord. Fifty fathoms in a day is considered a good day’s spinning. The cords are afterwards dyed of various colours, to render them more ornamental when woven into the maqueira.

The making of this is a simple process. Two horizontal rods are placed at about seven feet apart, over which the cord is passed some fifty or sixty times, thus forming the “woof.” The warp is then worked in by knotting the cross strings at equal distances apart, until there are enough. Two strong cords are then inserted where the rods pass through, and these being firmly looped, so as to draw all the parallel strings together, the rod is pulled out, and the hammock is ready to be used.

Of course, with very fine “redes,” and those intended to be disposed of to the traders, much pains are taken in the selection of the materials, the dyeing the cord, and the weaving it into the hammock. Sometimes very expensive articles are made ornamented with the brilliant feathers of birds cunningly woven among the meshes and along the borders.

Besides making the hammock, which is the universal couch of the Amazonian Indian, the women also manufacture a variety of beautiful baskets. Many species of palms and *calamus* supply them with materials for this purpose, one of the best being the “Iu” palm (*Astrocaryum acaule*). They also make many implements and utensils, some for cultivating the plantains, melons, and *manioc root*, and others for manufacturing the last-named vegetable into their favourite “farinha” (*cassava*). The Indians understood how to separate the poisonous juice of this valuable root from its wholesome farina before the arrival of white men among them; and the process by which they accomplish this purpose has remained without change up to the present hour, in fact, it is almost the same as that practised by the Spaniards and Portuguese, who simply adopted the Indian method. The work is performed by the women, and thus: the roots are brought home from the manioc “patch” in baskets, and then washed and peeled. The peeling is usually performed by the teeth; after that the roots are grated, the grater being a large wooden slab about three feet long, a foot wide, a little hollowed

out, and the hollow part covered all over with sharp pieces of quartz set in regular diamond-shaped patterns. Sometime a cheaper grater is obtained by using the aerial root of the *pashiuba* palm (*Iriartea exhorhiza*), which, being thickly covered over with hard spinous protuberances, serves admirably for the purpose.

The grated pulp is next placed to dry upon a sieve, made of the rind of a water-plant, and is afterwards put into a long elastic cylinder-shaped basket or net, of the bark of the “*jacitara*” palm (*Desmoncus macroacanthus*). This is the *tipiti*; and at its lower end there is a strong loop, through which a stout pole is passed; while the *tipiti* itself, when filled with pulp, is hung up to the branch of a tree, or to a firm peg in the wall. One end of the pole is then rested against some projecting point, that serves as a fulcrum, while the Indian woman, having seated herself upon the other end, with her infant in her arms, or perhaps some work in her hands, acts as the lever power. Her weight draws the sides of the *tipiti* together, until it assumes the form of an inverted cone; and thus the juice is gradually pressed out of the pulp, and drops into a vessel placed underneath to receive it. The mother must be careful that the little imp does not escape from under her eye, and perchance quench its thirst out of the vessel below. If such an accident were to take place, in a very few minutes she would have to grieve for a lost child; since the sap of the manioc root, the variety most cultivated by the Indians, is a deadly poison. This is the “*yucca amarga*,” or bitter manioc; the “*yucca dulce*,” or sweet kind, being quite innoxious, even if eaten in its raw state.

The remainder of the process consists in placing the grated pulp – now sufficiently dry – on a large pan or oven, and submitting it to the action of the fire. It is then thought sufficiently good for Indian use; but much of it is afterwards prepared for commerce, under different names, and sold as *semonilla* (erroneously called *semolina*), sago, and even as arrowroot.

At the bottom of that, poisonous tub, a sediment has all the while been forming. That is the *starch* of the manioc root – the *tapioca* of commerce: of course that is not thrown away.

The men of the tropic forest spend their lives in doing very little. They are idle and not much disposed to work – only when war or the chase calls them forth do they throw aside for awhile their indolent habit, and exhibit a little activity.

They hunt with the bow and arrow, and fish with a harpoon spear, nets, and sometimes by poisoning water with the juice of a vine called *barbasco*. The “*peixe boy*,” “*vaca marina*,” or “*manatee*,” – all three names being synonymes – is one of the chief animals of their pursuit. All the waters of the Amazon valley abound with manatees, probably of several species, and these large creatures are captured by the harpoon, just as seals or walrus are taken. Porpoises also frequent the South-American rivers; and large fresh-water fish of numerous species. The game hunted by the Amazonian Indians can scarcely be termed noble. We have seen that the large *mammalia* are few, and thinly distributed in the tropical forest. With the exception of the jaguar and peccary, the chase is limited to small quadrupeds – as the *capibara*, the *paca*, *agouti* – to many kinds of monkeys, and an immense variety of birds. The monkey is the most common game, and is not only eaten by all the Amazonian Indians, but by most of them considered as the choicest of food.

In procuring their game the hunters sometimes use the common bow and arrow, but most of the tribes are in possession of a weapon which they prefer to all others for this particular purpose. It is an implement of death so original in its character and so singular in its construction as to deserve a special and minute description.

The weapon I allude to is the “*blow-gun*,” called “*pucuna*” by the Indians themselves, “*gravitana*” by the Spaniards, and “*cerbatana*” by the Portuguese of Brazil.

When the Amazonian Indian wishes to manufacture for himself a *pucuna* he goes out into the forest and searches for two tall, straight stems of the “*pashiuba miri*” palm (*Iriartea setigera*). These he requires of such thickness that one can be contained within the other. Having found what he wants, he cuts both down and carries them home to his *molocca*. Neither of them is of such dimensions as to render this either impossible or difficult.

He now takes a long slender rod – already prepared for the purpose – and with this pushes out the pith from both stems, just as boys do when preparing their pop-guns from the stems of the elder-tree. The rod thus used is obtained from another species of *Iriarteia* palm, of which the wood is very hard and tough. A little tuft of fern-root, fixed upon the end of the rod, is then drawn backward and forward through the tubes, until both are cleared of any pith which may have adhered to the interior; and both are polished by this process to the smoothness of ivory. The palm of smaller diameter, being scraped to a proper size, is now inserted into the tube of the larger, the object being to correct any crookedness in either, should there be such; and if this does not succeed, both are whipped to some straight beam or post, and thus left till they become straight. One end of the bore, from the nature of the tree, is always smaller than the other; and to this end is fitted a mouthpiece of two peccary tusks to concentrate the breath of the hunter when blowing into the tube. The other end is the muzzle; and near this, on the top, a sight is placed, usually a tooth of the “paca” or some other rodent animal. This sight is glued on with a gum which another tropic tree furnishes. Over the outside, when desirous of giving the weapon an ornamental finish, the maker winds spirally a shining creeper, and then the *pucuna* is ready for action.

Sometimes only a single shank of palm is used, and instead of the pith being pushed out, the stem is split into two equal parts throughout its whole extent. The heart substance being then removed, the two pieces are brought together, like the two divisions of a cedarwood pencil, and tightly bound with a sipo.

The *pucuna* is usually about an inch and a half in diameter at the thickest end, and the bore about equal to that of a pistol of ordinary calibre. In length, however, the weapon varies from eight to twelve feet.

This singular instrument is designed, not for propelling a bullet, but an arrow; but as this arrow differs altogether from the common kind it also needs to be described.

The blow-gun arrow is about fifteen or eighteen inches long, and is made of a piece of split bamboo; but when the “patawa” palm can be found, this tree furnishes a still better material, in the long spines that grow out from the sheathing bases of its leaves. These are 18 inches in length, of a black colour, flattish though perfectly straight. Being cut to the proper length – which most of them are without cutting – they are whittled at one end to a sharp point. This point is dipped about three inches deep in the celebrated “curare” poison; and just where the poison mark terminates, a notch is made, so that the head will be easily broken off when the arrow is in the wound. Near the other end a little soft down of silky cotton (the floss of the *bombax ceiba*) is twisted around into a smooth mass of the shape of a spinning-top, with its larger end towards the nearer extremity of the arrow. The cotton is held in its place by being lightly whipped on by the delicate thread or fibre of a *bromelia*, and the mass is just big enough to fill the tube by gently pressing it inward.

The arrow thus made is inserted, and whenever the game is within reach the Indian places his mouth to the lower end or mouthpiece, and with a strong “puff,” which practice enables him to give, he sends the little messenger upon its deadly errand. He can hit with unerring aim at the distance of forty or fifty paces; but he prefers to shoot in a direction nearly vertical, as in that way he can take the surest aim. As his common game – birds and monkeys – are usually perched upon the higher branches of tall trees, their situation just suits him. Of course it is not the mere wound of the arrow that kills these creatures, but the poison, which in two or three minutes after they have been hit, will bring either bird or monkey to the ground. When the latter is struck he would be certain to draw out the arrow; but the notch, already mentioned, provides against this, as the slightest wrench serves to break off the envenomed head.

These arrows are dangerous things, – even for the manufacturer of them to play with: they are therefore carried in a quiver, and with great care, – the quiver consisting either of a bamboo joint or a neat wicker case.

The weapons of war used by the forest tribes are the common bow and arrows, also tipped with *curare*, and the “macana,” or war-club, a species peculiar to South America, made out of the hard heavy wood of the *pissaba* palm. Only one or two tribes use the spear; and both the “bolas” and lazo are quite unknown, as such weapons would not be available among the trees of the forest. These are the proper arms of the Horse Indian, the dweller on the open plains; but without them, for all war purposes, the forest tribes have weapons enough, and, unfortunately, make a too frequent use of them.

## Chapter Three.

### The Water-Dwellers of Maracaibo

The Andes mountains, rising in the extreme southern point of South America, not only extend throughout the whole length of that continent, but continue on through Central America and Mexico, under the name of “Cordilleras de Sierra Madre;” and still farther north to the shores of the Arctic Sea, under the very inappropriate appellation of the “Rocky Mountains.” You must not suppose that these stupendous mountains form one continuous elevation. At many places they furcate into various branches, throwing off spurs, and sometime parallel “sierras,” between which lie wide “valles,” or level plains of great extent. It is upon these high plateaux – many of them elevated 7,000 feet above the sea – that the greater part of the Spanish-American population dwells; and on them too are found most of the large cities of Spanish South America and Mexico.

These parallel chains meet at different points, forming what the Peruvians term “nodas” (knots); and, after continuing for a distance in one great cordillera, again bifurcate. One of the most remarkable of these bifurcations of the Andes occurs about latitude 2 degrees North. There the gigantic sierra separates into two great branches, forming a shape like the letter Y, the left limb being that which is usually regarded as the main continuation of these mountains through the Isthmus of Panama, while the right forms the eastern boundary of the great valley of the Magdalena river; and then, trending in an eastwardly direction along the whole northern coast of South America to the extreme point of the promontory of Paria.

Each of these limbs again forks into several branches or spurs, – the whole system forming a figure that may be said to bear some resemblance to a genealogical tree containing the pedigree of four or five generations.

It is only with one of the bifurcations of the right or eastern sierra that this sketch has to do. On reaching the latitude of 7 degrees north, this chain separates itself into two wings, which, after diverging widely to the east and west, sweep round again towards each other, as if desirous to be once more united. The western wing advances boldly to this reunion; but the eastern, after vacillating for a time, as if uncertain what course to take, turns its back abruptly on its old comrade, and trends off in a due east direction, till it sinks into insignificance upon the promontory of Paria.

The whole mass of the sierra, however, has not been of one mind; for, at the time of its indecision, a large spur detaches itself from the main body, and sweeps round, as if to carry out the union with the left wing advancing from the west. Although they get within sight of each other, they are not permitted to meet, – both ending abruptly before the circle is completed, and forming a figure bearing a very exact resemblance to the shoe of a racehorse. Within this curving boundary is enclosed a vast valley, – as large as the whole of Ireland, – the central portion of which, and occupying about one third of its whole extent, is a sheet of water, known from the days of the discovery of America, as the *Lake of Maracaibo*.

It obtained this appellation from the name of an Indian cazique, who was met upon its shores by the first discoverers; but although this lake was known to the earliest explorers of the New World, – although it lies contiguous to many colonial settlements both on the mainland and the islands of the Caribbean Sea, – the lake itself and the vast territory that surrounds it, remain almost as unknown and obscure as if they were situated among the central deserts of Africa.

And yet the valley of Maracaibo is one of the most interesting portions of the globe, – interesting not only as a *terra incognita*, but on account of the diversified nature of its scenery and productions. It possesses a *fauna* of a peculiar kind, and its *flora* is one of the richest in the world, not surpassed, – perhaps not equalled, – by that of any other portion of the torrid zone. To give a list of its vegetable productions would be to enumerate almost every species belonging to tropical America. Here are

found the well-known medicinal plants, – the sassafras and sarsaparilla, guaiacum, copaiva, cinchona, and cuspa, or *Cortex Angosturae*; here are the deadly poisons of *barbasco* and *mavacure*, and alongside them the remedies of the “palo sano,” and *mikania guaco*. Here likewise grow plants and trees producing those well-known dyes of commerce, the blue indigo, the red arnotto, the lake-coloured chica, the brazilletto, and dragon’s-blood; and above all, those woods of red, gold, and ebon tints, so precious in the eyes of the cabinet and musical-instrument makers of Europe.

Yet, strange to say, these rich resources lie, like treasures buried in the bowels of the earth, or gems at the bottom of the sea, still undeveloped. A few small lumbering establishments near the entrance of the lake, – here and there a miserable village, supported by a little coast commerce in dyewoods, or cuttings of ebony, – now and then a hamlet of fishermen, – a “hato” of goats and sheep; and at wider intervals, a “ganaderia” of cattle, or a plantation of cocoa-trees (*cocale*), furnish the only evidence that man has asserted his dominion over this interesting region. These settlements, however, are sparsely distributed, and widely distant from one another. Between them stretch broad savannas and forests, – vast tracts, untitled and even unexplored, – a very wilderness, but a wilderness rich in natural resources.

The Lake of Maracaibo is often, though erroneously, described as an arm of the sea. This description only applies to the *Gulf of Maracaibo*, which is in reality a portion of the Caribbean Sea. The lake itself is altogether different, and is a true fresh-water lake, separated from the gulf by a narrow neck or strait. Within this strait – called “boca,” or mouth – the salt water does not extend, except during very high tides or after long-continued *nortes* (north winds), which have the effect of driving the sea-water up into the lake, and imparting to some portions of it a saline or brackish taste. This, however, is only occasional and of temporary continuance; and the waters of the lake, supplied by a hundred streams from the horseshoe sierra that surrounds it, soon return to their normal character of freshness.

The shape of Lake Maracaibo is worthy of remark. The main body of its surface is of oval outline, – the longer diameter running north and south, – but taken in connection with the straits which communicate with the outer gulf, it assumes a shape somewhat like that of a Jew’s-harp, or rather of a kind of guitar, most in use among Spanish Americans, and known under the name of “mandolin” (or “bandolon”). To this instrument do the natives sometimes compare it.

Another peculiarity of Lake Maracaibo, is the extreme shallowness of the water along its shores. It is deep enough towards the middle part; but at many points around the shore, a man may wade for miles into the water, without getting beyond his depth. This peculiarity arises from the formation of the valley in which it is situated. Only a few spurs of the sierras that surround it approach near the edge of the lake. Generally from the bases of the mountains, the land slopes with a very gentle declination, – so slight as to have the appearance of a perfectly horizontal plain, – and this is continued for a great way under the surface of the water. Strange enough, however, after getting to a certain distance from the shore, the shoal water ends as abruptly as the escarpment of a cliff, and a depth almost unfathomable succeeds, – as if the central part of the lake was a vast subaqueous ravine, bounded on both sides by precipitous cliffs. Such, in reality, is it believed to be.

A singular phenomenon is observed in the Lake Maracaibo, which, since the days of Columbus, has not only puzzled the Curious, but also the learned and scientific, who have unsuccessfully attempted to explain it. This phenomenon consists in the appearance of a remarkable light, which shows itself in the middle of the night, and at a particular part of the lake, near its southern extremity. This light bears some resemblance to the *ignis fatuus* of our own marshes; and most probably is a phosphorescence of a similar nature, though on a much grander scale, – since it is visible at a vast distance across the open water. As it is seen universally in the same direction, and appears fixed in one place, it serves as a beacon for the fishermen and dye-wood traders who navigate the waters of the lake, – its longitude being precisely that of the straits leading outward to the gulf. Vessels that have strayed from their course, often regulate their reckoning by the mysterious “Farol de

Maracaibo” (Lantern of Maracaibo), – for by this name is the natural beacon known to the mariners of the lake.

Various explanations have been offered to account for this singular phenomenon, but none seem to explain it in a satisfactory manner. It appears to be produced by the exhalations that arise from an extensive marshy tract lying around the mouth of the river Zulia, and above which it universally shows itself. The atmosphere in this quarter is usually hotter than elsewhere, and supposed to be highly charged with electricity; but whatever may be the chemical process which produces the illumination, it acts in a perfectly silent manner. No one has ever observed any explosion to proceed from it, or the slightest sound connected with its occurrence.

Of all the ideas suggested by the mention of Lake Maracaibo, perhaps none are so interesting as those that relate to its native inhabitants, whose peculiar habits and modes of life not only astonished the early navigators, but eventually gave its name to the lake itself and to the extensive province in which it is situated. When the Spanish discoverers, sailing around the shores of the gulf, arrived near the entrance of Lake Maracaibo, they saw, to their amazement, not only single houses, but whole villages, apparently floating upon the water! On approaching nearer, they perceived that these houses were raised some feet above the surface, and supported by posts or piles driven into the mud at the bottom. The idea of Venice – that city built upon the sea, to which they had been long accustomed – was suggested by these *superaqueous* habitations; and the name of *Venezuela* (Little Venice) was at once bestowed upon the coast, and afterwards applied to the whole province now known as the Republic of Venezuela.

Though the “water villages” then observed have long since disappeared, many others of a similar kind were afterwards discovered in Lake Maracaibo itself, some of which are in existence to the present day. Besides here and there an isolated habitation, situated in some bay or “laguna,” there are four principal villages upon this plan still in existence, each containing from fifty to a hundred habitations. The inhabitants of some of these villages have been “Christianised,” that is, have submitted to the teaching of the Spanish missionaries; and one in particular is distinguished by having its little church – a regular *water* church – in the centre, built upon piles, just as the rest of the houses are, and only differing from the common dwellings in being larger and of a somewhat more pretentious style. From the belfry of this curious ecclesiastical edifice a brazen bell may be heard at morn and eve tolling the “oracion” and “vespers,” and declaring over the wide waters of the lake that the authority of the Spanish monk has replaced the power of the cazique among the Indians of the Lake Maracaibo. Not to all sides of the lake, however, has the cross extended its conquest. Along its western shore roams the fierce unconquered Goajiro, who, a true warrior, still maintains his independence; and even encroaches upon the usurped possessions both of monk and “militario.”

The *water-dweller*, however, although of kindred race with the Goajiro, is very different, both in his disposition and habits of life. He is altogether a man of peace, and might almost be termed a civilised being, – that is, he follows a regular industrial calling, by which he subsists. This is the calling of a fisherman, and in no part of the world could he follow it with more certainty of success, since the waters which surround his dwelling literally swarm with fish.

Lake Maracaibo has been long noted as the resort of numerous and valuable species of the finny tribe, in the capture of which the Indian fisherman finds ample occupation. He is betimes a fowler, – as we shall presently see, – and he also sometimes indulges, though more rarely, in the chase, finding game in the thick forests or on the green savannas that surround the lake, or border the banks of the numerous “riachos” (streams) running into it. On the savanna roams the graceful roebuck and the “venado,” or South-American deer, while along the river banks stray the capibara and the stout tapir, undisturbed save by their fierce feline enemies, the puma and spotted jaguar.

But hunting excursions are not a habit of the water Indian, whose calling, as already observed, is essentially that of a fisherman and “fowler,” and whose subsistence is mainly derived from two kinds of *water-dwellers*, like himself – one with fins, living below the surface, and denominated *fish*; another

with wings, usually resting *on* the surface, and known as *fowl*. These two creatures, of very different kinds and of many different species, form the staple and daily food of the Indian of Maracaibo.

In an account of his habits we shall begin by giving a description of the mode in which he constructs his singular dwelling.

Like other builders he begins by selecting the site. This must be a place where the water is of no great depth; and the farther from the shore he can find a shallow spot the better for his purpose, for he has a good reason for desiring to get to a distance from the shore, as we shall presently see. Sometimes a sort of subaqueous island, or elevated sandbank, is found, which gives him the very site he is in search of. Having pitched upon the spot, his next care is to procure a certain number of tree-trunks of the proper length and thickness to make “piles.” Not every kind of timber will serve for this purpose, for there are not many sorts that would long resist decay and the wear and tear of the water insects, with which the lake abounds. Moreover, the building of one of these aquatic houses, although it be only a rude hut, is a work of time and labour, and it is desirable therefore to make it as permanent as possible. For this reason great care is taken in the selection of the timber for the “piles.”

But it so chances that the forests around the lake furnish the very thing itself, in the wood of a tree known to the *Spanish inhabitants* as the “vera,” of “palo sano,” and to the natives as “guaiac.” It is one of the zygophyls of the genus *Guaiacum*, of which there are many species, called by the names of “iron-wood” or “lignum-vitae;” but the species in question is the *tree* lignum-vitae (*Guaiacum arboreum*), which attains to a height of 100 feet, with a fine umbrella-shaped head, and bright orange flowers. Its wood is so hard, that it will turn the edge of an axe, and the natives believe that if it be buried for a sufficient length of time under the earth it will turn to iron! Though this belief is not literally true, as regards the *iron*, it is not so much of an exaggeration as might be supposed. The “palo de fierro,” when buried in the soil of Maracaibo or immersed in the waters of the lake, in reality does undergo a somewhat similar metamorphose; in other words, it turns into stone; and the petrified trunks of this wood are frequently met with along the shores of the lake. What is still more singular – the piles of the water-houses often become petrified, so that the dwelling no longer rests upon wooden posts, but upon real columns of stone!

Knowing all this by experience, the Indian selects the guaiaic for his uprights, cuts them of the proper length; and then, launching them in the water, transports them to the site of his dwelling, and fixes them in their places.

Upon this a platform is erected, out of split boards of some less ponderous timber, usually the “ceiba,” or “silk-cotton tree” (*Bombax ceiba*), or the “cedro negro” (*Cedrela odorata*) of the order *Meliaceae*. Both kinds grow in abundance upon the shores of the lake, – and the huge trunks of the former are also used by the water Indian for the constructing of his canoe.

The platform, or floor, being thus established, about two or three feet above the surface of the water, it then only remains to erect, the walls and cover them over with a roof. The former are made of the slightest materials, – light saplings or bamboo poles, – usually left open at the interstices. There is no winter or cold weather here, – why should the walls be thick? There are heavy rains, however, at certain seasons of the year, and these require to be guarded against; but this is not a difficult matter, since the broad leaves of the “enea” and “vihai” (a species of *Heliconia*) serve the purpose of a roof just as well as tiles, slates, or shingles. Nature in these parts is bountiful, and provides her human creatures with a spontaneous supply of every want. Even ropes and cords she furnishes, for binding the beams, joists, and rafters together, and holding on the thatch against the most furious assaults of the wind. The numerous species of creeping and twining plants (“Ilianas” or “sipos”) serve admirably for this purpose. They are applied in their green state, and when contracted by exsiccation draw the timbers as closely together as if held by spikes of iron. In this manner and of such materials does the water Indian build his house.

Why he inhabits such a singular dwelling is a question that requires to be answered. With the *terra firma* close at hand, and equally convenient for all purposes of his calling, why does he not build

his hut there? So much easier too of access would it be, for he could then approach it either by land or by water; whereas, in its present situation, he can neither go away from his house or get back to it without the aid of his “periagua” (canoe). Moreover, by building on the beach, or by the edge of the woods, he would spare himself the labour of transporting those heavy piles and setting them in their places, – a work, as already stated, of no ordinary magnitude. Is it for personal security against human enemies, – for this sometimes drives a people to seek singular situations for their homes? No; the Indian of Maracaibo has his human foes, like all other people; but it is none of these that have forced him to adopt this strange custom. Other enemies? wild beasts? the dreaded jaguar, perhaps? No, nothing of this kind. And yet it is in reality a living creature that drives him to this resource, – that has forced him to flee from the mainland and take to the water for security against its attack, – a creature of such small dimensions, and apparently so contemptible in its strength, that you will no doubt smile at the idea of its putting a strong man to flight, – a little insect exactly the size of an English gnat, and no bigger, but so formidable by means of its poisonous bite, and its myriads of numbers, as to render many parts of the shores of Lake Maracaibo quite uninhabitable. You guess, no doubt, the insect to which I allude? You cannot fail to recognise it as the *mosquito*? Just so; it is the mosquito I mean, and in no part of South America do these insects abound in greater numbers, and nowhere are they more bloodthirsty than upon the borders of this great fresh-water sea. Not only one species of mosquito, but all the varieties known as “jejens,” “zancudos,” and “tempraneros,” here abound in countless multitudes, – each kind making its appearance at a particular hour of the day or night, – “mounting guard” (as the persecuted natives say of them) in turn, and allowing only short intervals of respite from their bitter attacks.

Now, it so happens, that although the various kinds of mosquitoes are peculiarly the productions of a marshy or watery region, – and rarely found where the soil is high and dry, – yet as rarely do they extend their excursions to a distance from the land. They delight to dwell under the shadow of leaves, or near the herbage of grass, plants, or trees, among which they were hatched. They do not stray far from the shore, and only when the breeze carries them do they fly out over the open water. Need I say more? You have now the explanation why the Indians of Maracaibo build their dwellings upon the water. It is simply to escape from the “plaga de moscas” (the pest of the flies).

Like most other Indians of tropical America, and some even of colder latitudes, those of Maracaibo go naked, wearing only the *guayueo*, or “waist-belt.” Those of them, however, who have submitted to the authority of the monks, have adopted a somewhat more modest garb, – consisting of a small apron of cotton or palm fibre, suspended from the waist, and reaching down to their knees.

We have already stated, that the water-dwelling Indian is a fisherman, and that the waters of the lake supply him with numerous kinds of fish of excellent quality. An account of these, with the method employed in capturing them, may not prove uninteresting.

First, there is the fish known as “liza,” a species of skate. It is of a brilliant silvery hue, with bluish corruscations. It is a small fish, being only about a foot in length, but is excellent to eat, and when preserved by drying, forms an article of commerce with the West-Indian islands. Along the coasts of Cumana and Magarita, there are many people employed in the *pesca de liza* (skate-fishery); but although the liza is in reality a sea fish, it abounds in the fresh waters of Maracaibo, and is there also an object of industrial pursuit. It is usually captured by seines, made out of the fibres of the *cocui aloe* (*agave cocuiza*), or of cords obtained from the unexpanded leaflets of the moriche palm (*Mauritia flexuosa*), both of which useful vegetable products are indigenous to this region. The roe of the liza, when dried in the sun, is an article in high estimation, and finds its way into the channels of commerce.

A still more delicate fish is the “pargo.” It is of a white colour tinged with rose; and of these great numbers are also captured. So, too, with the “doncella,” one of the most beautiful species, as its pretty name of “doncella” (young maiden) would indicate. These last are so abundant in some parts of the lake, that one of its bays is distinguished by the name of *Laguna de Doncella*.

A large, ugly fish, called the “vagre,” with an enormous head and wide mouth, from each side of which stretches a beard-like appendage, is also an object of the Indian’s pursuit. It is usually struck with a spear, or killed by arrows, when it shows itself near the surface of the water. Another monstrous creature, of nearly circular shape, and full three feet in diameter, is the “carite,” which is harpooned in a similar fashion.

Besides these there is the “viegita,” or “old-woman fish,” which itself feeds upon lesser creatures of the finny tribe, and especially upon the smaller species of shell-fish. It has obtained its odd appellation from a singular noise which it gives forth, and which resembles the voice of an old woman debilitated with extreme age.

The “dorado,” or gilded fish – so called on account of its beautiful colour – is taken by a hook, with no other bait attached than a piece of white rag. This, however, must be kept constantly in motion, and the bait is played by simply paddling the canoe over the surface of the lake, until the dorado, attracted by the white meteor, follows in its track, and eventually hooks itself.

Many other species of fish are taken by the water-Indians, as the “lebranche” which goes in large “schools,” and makes its breeding-place in the lagunas and up the rivers, and the “guabina,” with several kinds of sardines that find their way into the tin boxes of Europe; for the Maracaibo fisherman is not contented with an exclusive fish diet. He likes a little “casava,” or maize-bread, along with it; besides, he has a few other wants to satisfy, and the means he readily obtains in exchange for the surplus produce of his nets, harpoons, and arrows.

We have already stated that he is a fowler. At certain seasons of the year this is essentially his occupation. The fowling season with him is the period of northern winter, when the migratory aquatic birds come down from the boreal regions of Prince Rupert’s Land to disport their bodies in the more agreeable waters of Lake Maracaibo. There they assemble in large flocks, darkening the air with their myriads of numbers, now fluttering over the lake, or, at other times, seated on its surface silent and motionless. Notwithstanding their great numbers, however, they are too shy to be approached near enough for the “carry” of an Indian arrow, or a gun either; and were it not for a very cunning stratagem which the Indian has adopted for their capture, they might return again to their northern haunts without being minus an individual of their “count.”

But they are not permitted to depart thus unscathed. During their sojourn within the limits of Lake Maracaibo their legions get considerably thinned, and thousands of them that settle down upon its inviting waters are destined never more to take wing.

To effect their capture, the Indian fowler, as already stated, makes use of a very ingenious stratagem. Something similar is described as being practised in other parts of the world; but in no place is it carried to such perfection as upon the Lake Maracaibo.

The fowler first provides himself with a number of large gourd-shells of roundish form, and each of them at least as big as his own skull. These he can easily obtain, either from the herbaceous squash (*Cucurbita lagenaris*) or from the calabash tree (*Crescentia cujete*), both of which grow luxuriantly on the shores of the lake. Filling his periagua with these, he proceeds out into the open water to a certain distance from the land, or from his own dwelling. The distance is regulated by several considerations. He must reach a place which, at all hours of the day, the ducks and other waterfowl are not afraid to frequent; and, on the other hand, he must not go beyond such a depth as will bring the water higher than his own chin when wading through it. This last consideration is not of so much importance, for the water Indian can swim almost as well as a duck, and dive like one, if need be; but it is connected with another matter of greater importance – the convenience of having the birds as near as possible, to save him a too long and wearisome “wade.” It is necessary to have them so near, that at all hours they may be under his eye.

Having found the proper situation, which the vast extent of shoal water (already mentioned) enables him to do, he proceeds to carry out his design by dropping a gourd here and another there, until a large space of surface is covered by these floating shells. Each gourd has a stone attached to

it by means of a string, which, resting upon the bottom, brings the buoy to an anchor, and prevents it from being drifted into the deeper water or carried entirely away.

When his decoys are all placed, the Indian paddles back to his platform dwelling, and there, with watchful eye, awaits the issue. The birds are at first shy of these round yellow objects intruded upon their domain; but, as the hours pass, and they perceive no harm in them, they at length take courage and venture to approach. Urged by that curiosity which is instinctive in every creature, they gradually draw nigher and nigher, until at length they boldly venture into the midst of the odd objects and examine them minutely. Though puzzled to make out what it is all meant for, they can perceive no harm in the yellow globe-shaped things that only bob about, but make no attempt to do them any injury. Thus satisfied, their curiosity soon wears off, and the birds no longer regarding the floating shells as objects of suspicion, swim freely about through their midst, or sit quietly on the water side by side with them.

But the crisis has now arrived when it is necessary the Indian should act, and for this he speedily equips himself. He first ties a stout rope around his waist, to which are attached many short strings or cords. He then draws over his head a large gourd-shell, which, fitting pretty tightly, covers his whole skull, reaching down to his neck. This shell is exactly similar to the others already floating on the water, with the exception of having three holes on one side of it, two on the same level with the Indian's eyes, and the third opposite his mouth, intended to serve him for a breathing-hole.

He is now ready for work; and, thus oddly accoutred, he slips quietly down from his platform, and laying himself along the water, swims gently in the direction of the ducks.

He swims only where the water is too shallow to prevent him from crouching below the surface; for were he to stand upright, and wade, – even though he were still distant from them, – the shy birds might have suspicions about his after-approaches.

When he reaches a point where the lake is sufficiently deep, he gets upon his feet and wades, still keeping his shoulders below the surface. He makes his advance very slowly and warily, scarce raising a ripple on the surface of the placid lake, and the nearer he gets to his intended victims he proceeds with the greater caution.

The unsuspecting birds see the destroyer approach without having the slightest misgiving of danger. They fancy that the new comer is only another of those inanimate objects by their side – another gourd-shell drifting out upon the water to join its companions. They have no suspicion that this wooden counterfeit – like the horse of Troy – is inhabited by a terrible enemy.

Poor things! how could they? A stratagem so well contrived would deceive more rational intellects than theirs; and, in fact, having no idea of danger, they perhaps do not trouble themselves even to notice the new arrival.

Meanwhile the gourd has drifted silently into their midst, and is seen approaching the odd individuals, first one and afterwards another, as if it had some special business with each. This business appears to be of a very mysterious character; and in each case is abruptly brought to a conclusion, by the duck making a sudden dive under the water, – not head foremost, according to its usual practice, but in the reverse way, as if jerked down by the feet, and so rapidly that the creature has not time to utter a single “quack.”

After quite a number of individuals have disappeared in this mysterious manner, the others sometimes grow suspicious of the moving calabash, and either take to wing, or swim off to a less dangerous neighbourhood; but if the gourd performs its office in a skilful manner, it will be seen passing several times to and fro between the birds and the water village before this event takes place. On each return trip, when far from the flock, and near the habitations, it will be seen to rise high above the surface of the water. It will then be perceived that it covers the skull of a copper-coloured savage, around whose hips may be observed a double tier of dead ducks dangling by their necks from the rope upon his waist, and forming a sort of plumed skirt, the weight of which almost drags its wearer back into the water.

Of course a capture is followed by a feast; and during the fowling season of the year the Maracaibo Indian enjoys roast-duck at discretion. He does not trouble his head much about the green peas, nor is he particular to have his ducks stuffed with sage and onions; but a hot seasoning of red pepper is one of the indispensable ingredients of the South-American *cuisine*; and this he usually obtains from a small patch of capsicum which he cultivates upon the adjacent shore; or, if he be not possessed of land, he procures it by barter, exchanging his fowls or fish for that and a little maize or manioc flour, furnished by the coast-traders.

The Maracaibo Indian is not a stranger to commerce. He has been “Christianised,” – to use the phraseology of his priestly proselytiser, – and this has introduced him to new wants and necessities. Expenses that in his former pagan state were entirely unknown to him, have now become necessary, and a commercial effort is required to meet them. The Church must have its dues. Such luxuries as being baptised, married, and buried, are not to be had without expense, and the padre takes good care that none of these shall be had for nothing. He has taught his proselyte to believe that unless all these rites have been officially performed there is not the slightest chance for him in the next world; and under the influence of this delusion, the simple savage willingly yields up his tenth, his fifth, or, perhaps it would be more correct to say, his all. Between fees of baptism and burial, mulcts for performance of the marriage rite, contributions towards the shows and ceremonies of *dias de fiesta*, extravagant prices for blessed beads, leaden crucifixes, and images of patron saints, the poor Christianised Indian is compelled to part with nearly the whole of his humble gains; and the fear of not being able to pay for Christian burial after death, is often one of the torments of his life.

To satisfy the numerous demands of the Church, therefore, he is forced into a little action in the commercial line. With the water-dweller of Maracaibo, fish forms one of the staples of export trade, – of course in the preserved state, as he is too distant from any great town or metropolis to be able to make market of them while fresh. He understands, however, the mode of curing them, – which he accomplishes by sun-drying and smoking, – and, thus prepared, they are taken off his hands by the trader, who carries them all over the West Indies, where, with boiled rice, they form the staple food of thousands of the dark-skinned children of Ethiopia.

The Maracaibo Indian, however, has still another resource, which occasionally supplies him with an article of commercial export. His country – that is, the adjacent shores of the lake – produces the finest *caoutchouc*. There the India-rubber tree, of more than one species, flourishes in abundance; and the true “seringa,” that yields the finest and most valuable kind of this gummy juice, is nowhere found in greater perfection than in the forests of Maracaibo. The caoutchouc of commerce is obtained from many other parts of America, as well as from other tropical countries; but as many of the bottles and shoes so well-known in the india-rubber shops, are manufactured by the Indians of Maracaibo, we may not find a more appropriate place to give an account of this singular production, and the mode by which it is prepared for the purposes of commerce and manufacture.

As already mentioned, many species of trees yield india-rubber, most of them belonging either to the order of the “Morads,” or *Euphorbiaceae*. Some are species of *ficus*, but both the genera and species are too numerous to be given here. That which supplies the “bottle india-rubber” is a euphorbiaceous plant, – the *seringa* above mentioned, – whose proper botanical appellation is *Siphonia elastica*. It is a tall, straight, smooth-barked tree, having a trunk of about a foot in diameter, though in favourable situations reaching to much larger dimensions. The process of extracting its sap – out of which the caoutchouc is manufactured – bears some resemblance to the tapping of sugar-maples in the forests of the north.

With his small hatchet, or tomahawk, the Indian cuts a gash in the bark, and inserts into it a little wedge of wood to keep the sides apart. Just under the gash, he fixes a small cup-shaped vessel of clay, the clay being still in a plastic state, so that it may be attached closely to the bark. Into this vessel the milk-like sap of the *seringa* soon commences to run, and keeps on until it has yielded about the fifth of a pint. This, however, is not the whole yield of a tree, but only of a single wound; and it

is usual to open a great many gashes, or “taps,” upon the same trunk, each being furnished with its own cup or receiver. In from four to six hours the sap ceases to run.

The cups are then detached from the tree, and the contents of all, poured into a large earthen vessel, are carried to the place where the process of making the caoutchouc is to take place, – usually some dry open spot in the middle of the forest, where a temporary camp has been formed for the purpose.

When the dwelling of the Indian is at a distance from where the india-rubber tree grows, – as is the case with those of Lake Maracaibo, – it will not do to transport the sap thither. There must be no delay after the cups are filled, and the process of manufacture must proceed at once, or as soon as the milky juice begins to coagulate, – which it does almost on the instant.

Previous to reaching his camp, the “seringero” has provided a large quantity of palm-nuts, with which he intends to make a fire for smoking the caoutchouc. These nuts are the fruit of several kinds of palms, but the best are those afforded by two magnificent species, – the “Inaja” (*Maximiliana regia*), and the “Urucuri” (*Attalea excelsa*).

A fire is kindled of these nuts; and an earthen pot, with a hole in the bottom, is placed mouth downward over the pile. Through the aperture now rises a strong pungent smoke.

If it is a shoe that is intended to be made, a clay last is already prepared, with a stick standing out of the top of it, to serve as a handle, while the operation is going on. Taking the stick in his hand, the seringero dips the last lightly into the milk, or with a cup pours the fluid gently over it, so as to give a regular coating to the whole surface; and then, holding it over the smoke, he keeps turning it, jack-fashion, till the fluid has become dry and adhesive. Another dip is then given, and the smoking done as before; and this goes on, till forty or fifty different coats have brought the sides and soles of the shoe to a proper thickness. The soles, requiring greater weight, are, of course, oftener dipped than the “upper leather.”

The whole process of making the shoe does not occupy half an hour; but it has afterwards to receive some farther attention in the way of ornament; the lines and figures are yet to be executed, and this is done about two days after the smoking process. They are simply traced out with a piece of smooth wire, or oftener with the spine obtained from some tree, – as the thorny point of the *bromelia* leaf.

In about a week the shoes are ready to be taken from the last; and this is accomplished at the expense and utter ruin of the latter, which is broken into fragments, and then cleaned out. Water is used sometimes to soften the last, and the inner surface of the shoe is washed after the clay has been taken out.

Bottles are made precisely in the same manner, – a round ball, or other shaped mass of clay, serving as the mould for their construction. It requires a little more trouble to get the mould extracted from the narrow neck of the bottle.

It may be remarked that it is not the smoke of the palm-nuts that gives to the india-rubber its peculiar dark colour; that is the effect of age. When freshly manufactured, it is still of a whitish or cream colour; and only attains the dark hue after it has been kept for a considerable time.

We might add many other particulars about the mode in which the Indian of Maracaibo employs his time, but perhaps enough has been said to show that his existence is altogether an *odd* one.

## Chapter Four. The Esquimaux

The Esquimaux are emphatically an “odd people,” perhaps the oddest upon the earth. The peculiar character of the regions they inhabit has naturally initiated them into a system of habits and modes of life different from those of any other people on the face of the globe; and from the remoteness and inaccessibility of the countries in which they dwell, not only have they remained an unmixed people, but scarce any change has taken place in their customs and manners during the long period since they were first known to civilised nations.

The Esquimaux people have been long known and their habits often described. Our first knowledge of them was obtained from Greenland, – for the native inhabitants of Greenland are true Esquimaux, – and hundreds of years ago accounts of them were given to the world by the Danish colonists and missionaries – and also by the whalers who visited the coasts of that inhospitable land. In later times they have been made familiar to us through the Arctic explorers and whale-fishers, who have traversed the labyrinth of icy islands that extend northward from the continent of America. The Esquimaux may boast of possessing the longest country in the world. In the first place, Greenland is theirs, and they are found along the western shores of Baffin’s Bay. In North America proper their territory commences at the straits of Belle Isle, which separate Newfoundland from Labrador, and thence extends all around the shore of the Arctic Ocean, not only to Behring’s Straits, but beyond these, around the Pacific coast of Russian America, as far south as the great mountain Saint Elias. Across Behring’s Straits they are found occupying a portion of the Asiatic coast, under the name of Tchutski, and some of the islands in the northern angle of the Pacific Ocean are also inhabited by these people, though under a different name. Furthermore, the numerous ice islands which lie between North America and the Pole are either inhabited or visited by Esquimaux to the highest point that discovery has yet reached.

There can be little doubt that the Laplanders of northern Europe, and the Samoyedes, and other littoral peoples dwelling along the Siberian shores, are kindred races of the Esquimaux; and taking this view of the question, it may be said that the latter possess all the line of coast of both continents facing northward; in other words, that their country extends around the globe – though it cannot be said (as is often boastfully declared of the British empire) that “the sun never sets upon it;” for, over the “empire” of the Esquimaux, the sun not only sets, but remains out of sight of it for months at a time.

It is not usual, however, to class the Laplanders and *Asiatic Arctic* people with the Esquimaux. There are some essential points of difference; and what is here said of the Esquimaux relates only to those who inhabit the northern coasts and islands of America, and to the native Greenlanders.

Notwithstanding the immense extent of territory thus designated, notwithstanding the sparseness of the Esquimaux population, and the vast distances by which one little tribe or community is separated from another, the absolute similarity in their habits, in their physical and intellectual conformation, and, above all, in their languages, proves incontestably that they are all originally of one and the same race.

Whatever, therefore, may be said of a “Schelling,” or native Greenlander, will be equally applicable to an Esquimaux of Labrador, to an Esquimaux of the Mackenzie River or Behring’s Straits, or we might add, to a Khadiak islander, or a Tuski of the opposite Asiatic coast; always taking into account such differences of costume, dialect, modes of life, etc, as may be brought about by the different circumstances in which they are placed. In all these things, however, they are wonderfully alike; their dresses, weapons, boats, houses, and house implements, being almost the same in material and construction from East Greenland to the Tchutskoi Noss.

If their country be the longest in the world, it is also the *narrowest*. Of course, if we take into account the large islands that thickly stud the Arctic Ocean, it may be deemed broad enough; but I am speaking rather of the territory which they possess on the continents. This may be regarded as a mere strip following the outline of the coast, and never extending beyond the distance of a day's journey inland. Indeed, they only seek the interior in the few short weeks of summer, for the purpose of hunting the reindeer, the musk-ox, and other animals; after each excursion, returning again to the shores of the sea, where they have their winter-houses and more permanent home. They are, truly and emphatically, a *littoral* people, and it is to the sea they look for their principal means of support. But for this source of supply, they could not long continue to exist upon land altogether incapable of supplying the wants even of the most limited population.

The name *Esquimaux*— or, as it is sometimes written, “Eskimo,” — like many other national appellations, is of obscure origin. It is supposed to have been given to them by the Canadian voyageurs in the employ of the Hudson's Bay Company, and derived from the words *Ceux qui miaux* (those who mew), in relation to their screaming like cats. But the etymology is, to say the least, *suspicious*. They generally call themselves “Inuit” (pronounced enn-oo-eet), a word which signifies “men;” — though different tribes of them have distinct tribal appellations.

In personal appearance they cannot be regarded as at all prepossessing — though some of the younger men and girls, when cleansed of the filth and grease with which their skin is habitually coated, are far from ill-looking. Their natural colour is not much darker than that of some of the southern nations of Europe — the Portuguese, for instance — and the young girls often have blooming cheeks, and a pleasing expression of countenance. Their faces are generally of a broad, roundish shape, the forehead and chin both narrow and receding, and the cheeks very prominent, though not angular. On the contrary, they are rather fat and round. This prominence of the cheeks gives to their nose the appearance of being low and flat; and individuals are often seen with such high cheeks, that a ruler laid from one to the other would not touch the bridge of the nose between them!

As they grow older their complexion becomes darker, perhaps from exposure to the climate. Very naturally, too, both men and women grow uglier, but especially the latter, some of whom in old age present such a hideous aspect, that the early Arctic explorers could not help characterising them as *witches*.

The average stature of the Esquimaux is far below that of European nations, though individuals are sometimes met with nearly six feet in height. These, however, are rare exceptions; and an Esquimaux of such proportions would be a giant among his people. The more common height is from four feet eight inches to five feet eight; and the women are still shorter, rarely attaining the standard of five feet. The shortness of both men and women appears to be a deficiency in length of limb, for their bodies are long enough; but, as the Esquimaux is almost constantly in his canoe, or “kayak,” or upon his dog-sledge, his legs have but little to do, and are consequently stunted in their development.

A similar peculiarity is presented by the Comanche, and other Indians of the prairies, and also in the Guachos and Patagonian Indians, of the South-American Pampas, who spend most of their time on the backs of their horses.

The Esquimaux have no religion, unless we dignify by that name a belief in witches, sorcerers, “Shamans,” and good or evil spirits, with, some confused notion of a good and bad place hereafter. Missionary zeal has been exerted among them almost in vain. They exhibit an apathetic indifference to the teachings of Christianity.

Neither have they any political organisation; and in this respect they differ essentially from most savages known, the lowest of whom have usually their chiefs and councils of elders. This absence of all government, however, is no proof of their being lower in the scale of civilisation than other savages; but, perhaps, rather the contrary, for the very idea of chiefdom, or government, is a presumption of the existence of vice among a people, and the necessity of coercion and repression. To one another these rude people are believed to act in the most honest manner; and it could be shown that such

was likewise their behaviour towards strangers until they were corrupted by excessive temptation. All Arctic voyagers record instances of what they term petty theft, on the part of certain tribes of Esquimaux, – that is, the pilfering of nails, hatchets, pieces of iron-hoops, etc, – but it might be worth while reflecting that these articles are, in the eyes of the Esquimaux, what ingots of gold are to Europeans, and worth while inquiring if a few bars of the last-mentioned metal were laid loosely and carelessly upon the pavements of London, how long they would be in changing their owners? Theft should be regarded along with the amount of temptation; and it appears even in these recorded cases that only a few of the Esquimaux took part in it. I apprehend that something more than a few Londoners would be found picking up the golden ingots. How many thieves have we among us, with no greater temptation than a cheap cotton kerchief? – more than a few, it is to be feared.

In truth, the Esquimaux are by no means the savages they have been represented. The only important point in which they at all assimilate to the purely savage state is in the filthiness of their persons, and perhaps also in the fact of their eating much of their food (fish and flesh-meat) in a raw state. For the latter habit, however, they are partially indebted to the circumstances in which they are placed – fires or cookery being at times altogether impossible. They are not the only people who have been forced to eat raw flesh; and Europeans who have travelled in that inhospitable country soon get used to the practice, at the same time getting quite cured of their *dégoût* for it.

It is certainly not correct to characterise the Esquimaux as mere *savages*. On the contrary, they may be regarded as a civilised people, that is, so far as civilisation is permitted by the rigorous climate in which they live; and it would be safe to affirm that a colony of the most polished people in Europe, established as the Esquimaux are, and left solely to their own resources, would in a single generation exhibit a civilisation not one degree higher than that now met with among the Esquimaux. Indeed, the fact is already established: the Danish and Norwegian colonists of West Greenland, though backed by constant intercourse with their mother-land, are but little more civilised than the “Skellings,” who are their neighbours.

In reality, the Esquimaux have made the most of the circumstances in which they are placed, and continue to do so. Among them *agriculture* is impossible, else they would long since have taken to it. So too is commerce; and as to manufactures, it is doubtful whether Europeans could excel them under like circumstances. Whatever raw material their country produces, is by them both strongly and neatly fabricated, as indicated by the surprising skill with which they make their dresses, their boats, their implements for hunting and fishing; and in these accomplishments – the only ones practicable under their hyperborean heaven – they are perfect adepts. In such arts civilised Europeans are perfect simpletons to them, and the theories of fireside speculators, so lately promulgated in our newspapers, that Sir John Franklin and his crew could not fail to procure a living where the simple Esquimaux were able to make a home, betrayed only ignorance of the condition of these people. In truth, white men would starve, where the Esquimaux could live in luxurious abundance, so far superior to ours is their knowledge both of fishing and the chase. It is a well-recorded fact, that while our Arctic voyagers, at their winter stations, provided with good guns, nets, and every appliance, could but rarely kill a reindeer or capture a seal, the Esquimaux obtained both in abundance, and apparently without an effort; and we shall presently note the causes of their superiority in this respect.

The very dress of the Esquimaux is a proof of their superiority over other savages. At no season of the year do they go either naked, or even “ragged.” They have their changes to suit the seasons, – their summer dress, and one of a warmer kind for winter. Both are made in a most complicated manner; and the preparation of the material, as well as the manner by which it is put together, prove the Esquimaux women – for they are alike the tailors and dressmakers – to be among the best seamstresses in the world.

Captain Lyon, one of the most observant of Arctic voyagers, has given a description of the costume of the Esquimaux of Savage Island, and those of Repulse Bay, where he wintered, and his account is so graphic and minute in details, that it would be idle to alter a word of his language.

His description, with slight differences in make and material, will answer pretty accurately for the costume of the whole race.

“The clothes of both sexes are principally composed of fine and well-prepared reindeer pelts; the skins of bears, seals, wolves, foxes, and marmottes, are also used. The sealskins are seldom employed for any part of the dress except boots and shoes, as being more capable of resisting water, and of far greater durability than other leather.

“The general winter dress of the men is an ample outer coat of deer-skin, having no opening in front, and a large hood, which is drawn over the head at pleasure. This hood is invariably bordered with white fur from the thighs of the deer, and thus presents a lively contrast to the dark face which it encircles. The front or belly part of the coat is cut off square with the upper part of the thighs, but behind it is formed into a broad skirt, rounded at the lower end, which reaches to within a few inches of the ground. The lower edges and tails of these dresses are in some cases bordered with bands of fur of an opposite colour to the body; and it is a favourite ornament to hang a fringe of little strips of skin beneath the border. The embellishments give a very pleasing appearance to the dress. It is customary in blowing weather to tie a piece of skin or cord tight round the waist of the coat; but in other cases the dress hangs loose.

“Within the covering I have just described is another, of precisely the same form; but though destitute of ornaments of leather, it has frequently little strings of beads hanging to it from the shoulders or small of the back. This dress is of thinner skin, and acts as a shirt, the hairy part being placed near the body: it is the indoors habit. When walking, the tail is tied up by two strings to the back, so that it may not incommode the legs. Besides these two coats, they have also a large cloak, or, in fact, an open deer-skin, with sleeves: this, from its size, is more frequently used as a blanket; and I but once saw it worn by a man at the ship, although the women throw it over their shoulders to shelter themselves and children while sitting on the sledge.

“The trowsers, which are tightly tied round the loins, have no waistbands, but depend entirely by the drawing-string; they are generally of deer-skin, and ornamented in the same manner as the coats. One of the most favourite patterns is an arrangement of the skins of deer’s legs, so as to form very pretty stripes. As with the jackets, there are two pair of these indispensables, reaching no lower than the knee-cap, which is a cause of great distress in cold weather, as that part is frequently severely frost-bitten; yet, with all their experience of this bad contrivance, they will not add an inch to the established length.

“The boots reach to the bottom of the breeches, which hang loosely over them. In these, as in other parts of the dress, are many varieties of colour, material, and pattern, yet in shape they never vary. The general winter boots are of deer-skin; one having the hair next the leg, and the other with the fur outside. A pair of soft slippers of the same kind are worn between the two pair of boots, and outside of all a strong sealskin shoe is pulled to the height of the ankle, where it is tightly secured by a drawing-string. For hunting excursions, or in summer when the country is thawed, one pair of boots only is worn. They are of sealskin, and so well sewed and prepared without the hair, that although completely saturated, they allow no water to pass through them. The soles are generally of the tough hide of the walrus, or of the large seal called Oö-ghioo, so that the feet are well protected in walking over rough ground. Slippers are sometimes worn outside. In both cases the boots are tightly fastened round the instep with a thong of leather. The mittens in common use are of deer-skin, with the hair inside; but, in fact, every kind of skin is used for them. They are extremely comfortable when dry; but if once wetted and frozen again, in the winter afford as little protection to the hands as a case of ice would do. In summer, and in fishing, excellent sealskin mittens are used, and have the same power of resisting water as the boots of which I have just spoken. The dresses I have just described are chiefly used in winter. During the summer it is customary to wear coats, boots, and even breeches, composed of the prepared skins of ducks, with the feathers next the body. These are comfortable, light, and easily prepared. The few ornaments in their possession are worn by the men. These are

some bandeaus which encircle the head, and are composed of various-coloured leather, plaited in a mosaic pattern, and in some cases having human hair woven in them, as a contrast to the white skins. From the lower edge foxes' teeth hang suspended, arranged as a fringe across the forehead. Some wear a musk-ox tooth, a bit of ivory, or a small piece of bone.

“The clothing of the women is of the same materials as that of the men, but in shape almost every part is different from the male dress. An inner jacket is worn next the skin, and the fur of the other is outside. The hind-flap, or tail, is of the same form before described, but there is also a small flap in front, extending about halfway down the thigh. The coats have each an immense hood, which, as well as covering the head, answers the purpose of a child's cradle for two or three years after the birth of an infant. In order to keep the burden of the child from drawing the dress tight across the throat, a contrivance, in a great measure resembling the slings of a soldier's knapsack, is affixed to the collar or neck part, whence it passes beneath the hood, crosses, and, being brought under the arms, is secured on each side the breast by a wooden button. The shoulders of the women's coat have a bag-like space, for the purpose of facilitating the removal of the child from the hood round to the breast without taking it out of the jacket.

“A girdle is sometimes worn round the waist: it answers the double purposes of comfort and ornament; being composed of what they consider valuable trinkets, such as foxes' bones (those of the rableeaghioo), or sometimes of the ears of deer, which hang in pairs to the number of twenty or thirty, and are trophies of the skill of the hunter, to whom the wearer is allied. The inexpressibles of the women are in the same form as those of the men, but they are not ornamented by the same curious arrangement of colours; the front part is generally of white, and the back of dark fur. The manner of securing them at the waist is also the same; but the drawing-strings are of much greater length, being suffered to hang down by one side, and their ends are frequently ornamented with some pendent jewel, such as a grinder or two of the musk-ox, a piece of ivory, a small ball of wood, or a perforated stone.

“The boots of the fair sex are, without dispute, the most extraordinary part of their equipment, and are of such an immense size as to resemble leather sacks, and to give a most deformed, and, at the same time, ludicrous appearance to the whole figure, the bulky part being at the knee; the upper end is formed into a pointed flap, which, covering the front of the thigh, is secured by a button or knot within the waistband of the breeches.

“Some of these ample articles of apparel are composed with considerable taste, of various-coloured skins; they also have them of parchment, – seals' leather. Two pairs are worn; and the feet have also a pair of sealskin slippers, which fit close, and are tightly tied round the ankle.

“Children have no kind of clothing, but lie naked in their mothers' hoods until two or three years of age, when they are stuffed into a little dress, generally of fawn-skin, which has jacket and breeches in one, the back part being open; into these they are pushed, when a string or two closes all up again. A cap forms an indispensable part of the equipment, and is generally of some fantastical shape; the skin of a fawn's head is a favourite material in the composition, and is sometimes seen with the ears perfect; the nose and holes for the eyes lying along the crown of the wearer's head, which in consequence, looks like that of an animal.”

The same author also gives a most graphic description of the curious winter dwellings of the Esquimaux, which on many parts of the coast are built out of the only materials to be had, —*ice and snow!* Snow for the walls and ice for the windows! you might fancy the house of the Esquimaux to be a very cold dwelling; such, however, is by no means its character.

“The entrance to the dwellings,” says Captain Lyon, “was by a hole, about a yard in diameter, which led through a low-arched passage of sufficient breadth for two to pass in a stooping posture, and about sixteen feet in length; another hole then presented itself, and led through a similarly-shaped, but shorter passage, having at its termination a round opening, about two feet across. Up this hole we crept one step, and found ourselves in a dome about seven feet in height, and as many in diameter,

from whence the three dwelling-places, with arched roofs, were entered. It must be observed that this is the description of a large hut, the smaller ones, containing one or two families, have the domes somewhat differently arranged.

“Each dwelling might be averaged at fourteen or sixteen feet in diameter by six or seven in height, but as snow alone was used in their construction, and was always at hand, it might be supposed that there was no particular size, that being of course at the option of the builder. The laying of the arch was performed in such a manner as would have satisfied the most regular artist, the key-piece on the top, being a large square slab. The blocks of snow used in the buildings were from four to six inches in thickness, and about a couple of feet in length, carefully pared with a large knife. Where two families occupied a dome, a seat was raised on either side, two feet in height. These raised places were used as beds, and covered in the first place with whalebone, sprigs of andromeda, or pieces of sealskin, over these were spread deer-pelts and deer-skin clothes, which had a very warm appearance. The pelts were used as blankets, and many of them had ornamental fringes of leather sewed round their edges.

“Each dwelling-place was illumined by a broad piece of transparent fresh-water ice, of about two feet in diameter, which formed part of the roof, and was placed over the door. These windows gave a most pleasing light, free from glare, and something like that which is thrown through ground glass. We soon learned that the building of a house was but the work of an hour or two, and that a couple of men – one to cut the slabs and the other to lay them – were labourers sufficient.

“For the support of the lamps and cooking apparatus, a mound of snow is erected for each family; and when the master has two wives or a mother, both have an independent place, one at each end of the bench.

“I find it impossible to attempt describing everything at a second visit, and shall therefore only give an account of those articles of furniture which must be always the same, and with which, in five minutes, any one might be acquainted. A frame, composed of two or three broken fishing-spears, supported in the first place a large hoop of wood or bone, across which an open-meshed, and ill-made net was spread or worked for the reception of wet or damp clothes, skins, etc, which could be dried by the heat of the lamp. On this contrivance the master of each hut placed his gloves on entering, first carefully clearing them of snow.

“From the frame above mentioned, one or more coffin-shaped stone pots were suspended over lamps of the same material, crescent-shaped, and having a ridge extending along their back; the bowl part was filled with blubber, and the oil and wicks were ranged close together along the edge. The wicks were made of moss and trimmed by a piece of asbestos, stone, or wood; near at hand a large bundle of moss was hanging for a future supply. The lamps were supported by sticks, bones, or pieces of horn, at a sufficient height to admit an oval pot of wood or whalebone beneath, in order to catch any oil that might drop from them. The lamps varied considerably in size, from two feet to six inches in length, and the pots were equally irregular, holding from two or three gallons to half a pint. Although I have mentioned a kind of scaffolding, these people did not all possess so grand an establishment, many being contented to suspend their pot to a piece of bone stuck in the wall of the hut. One young woman was quite a caricature in this way: she was the inferior wife of a young man, whose senior lady was of a large size, and had a corresponding lamp, etc, at one corner; while she herself, being short and fat, had a lamp the size of half a dessert-plate, and a pot which held a pint only.

“Almost every family was possessed of a large wooden tray, resembling those used by butchers in England; its offices, however, as we soon perceived, were more various, some containing raw flesh of seals and blubber, and others, skins, which were steeping in urine. A quantity of variously-sized bowls of whalebone, wood, or skin, completed the list of vessels, and it was evident that they were made to contain *anything*.”

The Esquimaux use two kinds of boats, – the “oomiak” and “kayak.” The oomiak is merely a large species of punt, used exclusively by the women; but the kayak is a triumph in the art of naval

architecture, and is as elegant as it is ingenious. It is about twenty-five feet in length, and less than two in breadth of beam. In shape it has been compared to a weaver's shuttle, though it tapers much more elegantly than this piece of machinery. It is decked from stem to stern, excepting a circular hole very nearly amidships, and this round hatchway is just large enough to admit the body of an Esquimaux in a sitting posture. Around the rim of the circle is a little ridge, sometimes higher in front than at the back, and this ridge is often ornamented with a hoop of ivory. A flat piece of wood runs along each side of the frame, and is, in fact, the only piece of any strength in a kayak. Its depth in the centre is four or five inches, and its thickness about three fourths of an inch; it tapers to a point at the commencement of the stem and stern projections. Sixty-four ribs are fastened to this gunwale piece; seven slight rods run the whole length of the bottom and outside the ribs. The bottom is rounded, and has no keel; twenty-two little beams or cross-pieces keep the frame on a stretch above, and one strong batten runs along the centre, from stem to stern, being, of course, discontinued at the seat part. The ribs are made of ground willow, also of whalebone, or, if it can be procured, of good-grained wood. The whole contrivance does not weigh over fifty or sixty pounds; so that a man easily carries his kayak on his head, which, by the form of the rim, he can do without the assistance of his hands.

An Esquimaux prides himself in the neat appearance of his boat, and has a warm skin placed in its bottom to sit on. His posture is with the legs pointed forward, and he cannot change his position without the assistance of another person; in all cases where a weight is to be lifted, an alteration of stowage, or any movement to be made, it is customary for two kayaks to lie together; and the paddle of each being placed across the other, they form a steady double boat. An inflated seal's bladder forms, invariably, part of the equipage of a canoe, and the weapons are confined in their places by small lines of whalebone, stretched tightly across the upper covering, so as to receive the points or handles of the spears beneath them. Flesh is frequently stowed within the stem or stern, as are also birds and eggs; but a seal, although round, and easily made to roll, is so neatly balanced on the upper part of the boat as seldom to require a lashing. When Esquimaux are not paddling, their balance must be nicely preserved, and a trembling motion is always observable in the boat. The most difficult position for managing a kayak is when going before the wind, and with a little swell running. Any inattention would instantly; by exposing the broadside, overturn this frail vessel. The dexterity with which they are turned, the velocity of their way, and the extreme elegance of form of the kayaks, render an Esquimaux of the highest interest when sitting independently, and urging his course towards his prey.

“The paddle is double-bladed, nine feet three inches in length, small at the grasp, and widening to four inches at the blades, which are thin, and edged with ivory for strength as well as ornament.

“The next object of importance to the boat is the sledge, which finds occupation during at least three fourths of the year. A man who possesses both this and a canoe is considered a person of property. To give a particular description of the sledge would be impossible, as there are no two actually alike; and the materials of which they are composed are as various as their form. The best are made of the jaw-bones of the whale, sawed to about two inches in thickness, and in depth from six inches to a foot. These are the runners, and are shod with a thin plank of the same material; the side-pieces are connected by means of bones, pieces of wood, or deers' horns, lashed across, with a few inches space between each, and they yield to any great strain which the sledge may receive. The general breadth of the upper part of the sledge is about twenty inches; but the runners lean inwards, and therefore at bottom it is rather greater. The length of bone sledges is from four feet to fourteen. Their weight is necessarily great; and one of moderate size, that is to say, about ten or twelve feet, was found to be two hundred and seventeen pounds. The skin of the walrus is very commonly used during the coldest part of the winter, as being hard-frozen, and resembling an inch board, with ten times the strength, for runners. Another ingenious contrivance is, by casing moss and earth in seal's skin, so that by pouring a little water, a round hard bolster is easily formed. Across all these kinds of runners there is the same arrangement of bones, sticks, etc, on the upper part; and the surface which passes over the snow is coated with ice, by mixing snow with fresh water, which assists greatly in

lightening the load for the dogs, as it slides forwards with ease. Boys frequently amuse themselves by yoking several dogs to a small piece of seal's skin, and sitting on it, holding by the traces. Their plan is then to set off at full speed, and he who bears the greatest number of bumps before he relinquishes his hold is considered a very fine fellow.

“The Esquimaux possess various kinds of spears, but their difference is chiefly in consequence of the substances of which they are composed, and not in their general form.

“One called *kä-të-tëek*, is a large and strong-handled spear, with an ivory point made for despatching any wounded animal in the water. It is never thrown, but has a place appropriated for it on the kayak.

“The *oonak* is a lighter kind than the former; also ivory-headed. It has a bladder fastened to it, and has a loose head with a line attached; this being darted into an animal, is instantly liberated from the handle which gives the impetus. Some few of these weapons are constructed of the solid ivory of the unicorn's horn, about four feet in length, and remarkably well-rounded and polished.

“*Ip-pöö-töö-yöö*, is another kind of hand-spear, varying but little from the one last described. It has, however, no appendages.

“The *Noôgh-wit* is of two kinds; but both are used for striking birds, young animals, or fish. The first has a double fork at the extremity, and there are three other barbed ones at about half its length, diverging in different directions, so that if the end pair should miss, some of the centre ones might strike. The second kind has only three barbed forks at the head. All the points are of ivory, and the natural curve of the walrus tusk favours and facilitates their construction.

“Amongst the minor instruments of the ice-hunting are a long bone feeler for plumbing any cracks through which seals are suspected of breathing, and also for trying the safety of the road. Another contrivance is occasionally used with the same effect as the float of a fishing-line. Its purpose is to warn the hunter, who is watching a seal-hole, when the animal rises to the surface, so that he may strike without seeing, or being seen, by his prey. This is a most delicate little rod of bone or ivory, of about a foot in length, and the thickness of a fine knitting-needle. At the lower end is a small knob like a pin's head, and the upper extremity has a fine piece of sinew tied to it, so as to fasten it loosely to the side of the hole. The animal, on rising, does not perceive so small an object hanging in the water, and pushes it up with his nose, when the watchful Esquimaux, observing his little beacon in motion, strikes down, and secures his prize.

“Small ivory pegs or pins are used to stop the holes made by the spears in the animal's body; thus the blood, a great luxury to the natives, is saved.

“The same want of wood which renders it necessary to find substitutes in the construction of spears, also occasions the great variety of bows. The horn of the musk-ox, thinned horns of deer, or other bony substances, are as frequently used or met with as wood, in the manufacture of these weapons, in which elasticity is a secondary consideration. Three or four pieces of horn or wood are frequently joined together in one bow, – the strength lying alone in a vast collection of small plaited sinews; these, to the number of perhaps a hundred, run down the back of the bow, and being quite tight, and having the spring of catgut, cause the weapon, when unstrung, to turn the wrong way; when bent, their united strength and elasticity are amazing. The bowstring is of fifteen to twenty plaits, each loose from the other, but twisted round when in use, so that a few additional turns will at any time alter its length. The general length of the bows is about three feet and a half.

“The arrows are short, light, and formed according to no general rule as to length or thickness. A good one has half the shaft of bone, and a head of hard slate, or a small piece of iron; others have sharply-pointed bone heads: none are barbed. Two feathers are used for the end, and are tied opposite each other, with the flat sides parallel. A neatly-formed case contains the bow and a few arrows. Sealskin is preferred for this purpose, as more effectually resisting the wet than any other. A little bag, which is attached to the side, contains a stone for sharpening, and some spare arrow-heads carefully wrapped up in a piece of skin.

“The bow is held in a horizontal position, and though capable of great force, is rarely used at a greater distance than from twelve to twenty yards.”

Their houses, clothing, sledges, boats, utensils, and arms, being now described, it only remains to be seen in what manner these most singular people pass their time, how they supply themselves with food, and how they manage to support life during the long dark winter, and the scarce less hospitable summer of their rigorous clime. Their occupations from year to year are carried on with an almost unvarying regularity, though, like their dresses, they change according to the season.

Their short summer is chiefly employed in hunting the reindeer, and other quadrupeds, – for the simple reason that it is at this season that these appear in greatest numbers among them, migrating northward as the snow thaws from the valleys and hill-sides. Not but that they also kill the reindeer in other seasons, for these animals do not all migrate southward on the approach of winter, a considerable number remaining all the year upon the shores of the Arctic Sea, as well as the islands to the north of them. Of course, the Esquimaux kills a reindeer when and where he can; and it may be here remarked, that in no part of the American continent has the reindeer been trained or domesticated as among the Laplanders and the people of Russian Asia. Neither the Northern Indians (Tinné) nor the Esquimaux have ever reached this degree in domestic civilisation, and this fact is one of the strongest points of difference between the American Esquimaux and their kindred races in the north of Asia. One tribe of true Esquimaux alone hold the reindeer in subjection, viz the Tuski, already mentioned, on the Asiatic shore; and it might easily be shown that the practice reached them from the contiguous countries of northern Asia. The American Esquimaux, like those of Greenland, possess only the dog as a domesticated animal; and him they have trained to draw their sledges in a style that exhibits the highest order of skill, and even elegance. The Esquimaux dog is too well-known to require particular description. He is often brought to this country in the return ships of Arctic whalers and voyagers; and his thick, stout body covered closely with long stiff hair of a whitish or yellowish colour, his cocked ears and smooth muzzle, and, above all, the circle-like curling of his bushy tail, will easily be remembered by any one who has ever seen this valuable animal.

In summer, then, the Esquimaux desert their winter houses upon the shore, and taking with them their tents make an excursion into the interior. They do not go far from the sea – no farther than is necessary to find the valleys browsed by the reindeer, and the fresh-water lakes, which, at this season, are frequented by flocks of swans, geese of various kinds, ducks, and other aquatic birds. Hunting the reindeer forms their principal occupation at this time; but, of course, “all is fish that comes into the net” of an Esquimaux; and they also employ themselves in capturing the wild fowl and the fresh-water fish, in which these lakes abound. With the wild fowl it is the breeding and moulting season, and the Esquimaux not only rob them of their eggs, but take large numbers of the young before they are sufficiently fledged to enable them to fly, and also the old ones while similarly incapacitated from their condition of “moult.” In their swift kayaks which they have carried with them on their heads, they can pursue the fluttering flocks over any part of a lake, and overtake them wherever they may go. This is a season of great plenty in the larder of the *Inuit*.

The fresh-water fish are struck with spears out of the kayaks, or, when there is ice on the water strong enough to bear the weight of a man, the fish are captured in a different manner. A hole is broken in the ice, the broken fragments are skimmed off and cast aside, and then the fisherman lets down a shining bauble – usually the white tooth of some animal – to act as a bait. This he keeps bobbing about until the fish, perceiving it afar off through the translucent water, usually approaches to reconnoitre, partly from curiosity, but more, perhaps, to see if it be anything to eat. When near enough the Esquimaux adroitly pins the victim with his fish spear, and lands it upon the ice. This species of fishing is usually delivered over to the boys – the time of the hunters being too valuable to be wasted in waiting for the approach of the fish to the decoy, an event of precarious and uncertain occurrence.

In capturing the reindeer, the Esquimaux practises no method very different from that used by “still hunters” in other parts of America. He has to depend alone upon his bow and arrows, but with these poor weapons he contrives to make more havoc among a herd of deer than would a backwoods hunter with his redoubtable rifle. There is no mystery about his superior management. It consists simply in the exhibition of the great strategy and patience with which he makes his approaches, crawling from point to point and using every available cover which the ground may afford.

But all this would be of little avail were it not for a *ruse* which he puts in practice, and which brings the unsuspecting deer within reach of his deadly arrows. This consists in a close imitation of the cries of the animal, so close that the sharp-eared creature itself cannot detect the counterfeit, but, drawing nearer and nearer to the rock or bush from which the call appears to proceed, falls a victim to the deception. The silent arrow makes no audible sound; the herd, if slightly disturbed at seeing one of their number fall, soon compose themselves, and go on browsing upon the grass or licking up the lichen. Another is attracted by the call, and another, who fall in their turn victims either to their curiosity or the instinct of amorous passions.

For this species of hunting, the bow far excels any other weapon; even the rifle is inferior to it.

Sometimes the Esquimaux take the deer in large numbers, by hunting them with dogs, driving the herd into some defile or *cul de sac* among the rocks, and then killing them at will with their arrows and javelins. This, however, is an exceptional case, as such natural “pounds” are not always at hand. The Indians farther south construct artificial enclosures; but in the Esquimaux country there is neither time nor material for such elaborate contrivances.

The Esquimaux who dwell in those parts frequented by the musk-oxen, hunt these animals very much as they do the reindeer; but killing a musk bull, or cow either, is a feat of far grander magnitude, and requires more address than shooting a tiny deer.

I have said that the Esquimaux do not, even in these hunting excursions, stray very far into the interior. There is a good reason for their keeping close to the seashore. Were they to penetrate far into the land they would be in danger of meeting with their *bitter* foemen, the *Tinné* Indians, who in this region also hunt reindeer and musk-oxen. War to the knife is the practice between these two races of people, and has ever been since the first knowledge of either. They often meet in conflict upon the rivers inland, and these conflicts are of so cruel and sanguinary a nature as to imbue each with a wholesome fear of the other. The Indians, however, dread the Esquimaux more than the latter fear them; and up to a late period took good care never to approach their coasts; but the musket and rifle have now got into the hands of some of the northern tribes, who avail themselves of these superior weapons, not only to keep the Esquimaux at bay, but also to render them more cautious about extending their range towards the interior.

When the dreary winter begins to make its appearance, and the reindeer grow scarce upon the snow-covered plains, the Esquimaux return to their winter villages upon the coast. Quadrupeds and birds no longer occupy their whole attention, for the drift of their thoughts is now turned towards the inhabitants of the great deep. The seal and the walrus are henceforth the main objects of pursuit. Perhaps during the summer, when the water was open, they may have visited the shore for the purpose of capturing that great giant of the icy seas – a whale. If so, and they have been successful in only one or two captures, they may look forward to a winter of plenty – since the flesh of a full-grown whale, or, better still, a brace of such ample creatures, would be sufficient to feed a whole tribe for months.

They have no curing process for this immense carcass; they stand in need of none. Neither salt nor smoking is required in their climate. Jack Frost is their provision curer, and performs the task without putting them either to trouble or expense. It is only necessary for them to hoist the great flitches upon scaffolds, already erected for the purpose, so as to keep the meat from the wolves, wolverines, foxes, and their own half-starved dogs. From their aerial larder they can cut a piece of blubber whenever they feel hungry, or they have a mind to eat, and this *mind* they are in so long as a morsel is left.

Their mode of capturing a whale is quite different from that practised by the whale-fishers. When the huge creature is discovered near, the whole tribe sally forth, and surround it in their kayaks; they then hurl darts into its body, but instead of these having long lines attached to them, they are provided with sealskins sewed up air-tight and inflated, like bladders. When a number of these become attached to the body of the whale, the animal, powerful though he be, finds great difficulty in sinking far down, or even progressing rapidly through the water. He soon rises to the surface, and the sealskin buoys indicate his whereabouts to the occupants of the kayaks, who in their swift little crafts, soon dart up to him again, and shoot a fresh volley into his body. In this way the whale is soon “wearied out,” and then falls a victim to their larger spears, just as in the case where a capture is made by regular, whalers.

I need scarcely add that a success of this kind is hailed as a jubilee of the tribe, since it not only brings a benefit to the whole community, but is also a piece of fortune of somewhat rare occurrence.

When no whales have been taken, the long, dark winter may justly be looked forward to with some solicitude; and it is then that the Esquimaux requires to put forth all his skill and energies for the capture of the walrus or the seal – the latter of which may be regarded as the staff of his life, furnishing him not only with food, but with light, fuel, and clothing for his body and limbs.

Of the seals that inhabit the Polar Seas there are several species; but the common seal (*Calocephalus vitulina*) and the harp-seal (*Calocephalus Groenlandicus*) are those most numerous, and consequently the principal object of pursuit.

The Esquimaux uses various stratagems for taking these creatures, according to the circumstances in which they may be encountered; and simpletons as the seals may appear, they are by no means easy of capture. They are usually very shy and suspicious, even in places where man has never been seen by them. They have other enemies, especially in the great polar bear; and the dread of this tyrant of the icy seas keeps them ever on the alert. Notwithstanding their watchfulness, however, both the bear and the biped make great havoc among them, and each year hundreds of thousands of them are destroyed.

The bear, in capturing seals, exhibits a skill and cunning scarce excelled by that of the rational being himself. When this great quadruped perceives a seal basking on the edge of an ice-field, he makes his approaches, not by rushing directly towards it, which he well knows would defeat his purpose. If once seen by the seal, the latter has only to betake himself to the water, where it can soon sink or swim beyond the reach of the bear. To prevent this, the bear gets well to leeward, and then diving below the surface, makes his approaches under water, now and then cautiously raising his head to get the true bearings of his intended victim. After a number of these subaqueous “reaches,” he gets close in to the edge of the floe in such a position as to cut off the seal’s retreat to the water. A single spring brings him on the ice, and then, before the poor seal has time to make a brace of flounders, it finds itself locked in the deadly embrace of the bear. When seals are thus detected asleep, the Esquimaux approaches them in his kayak, taking care to paddle cautiously and silently. If he succeed in getting between them and the open water, he kills them in the ordinary way – by simply knocking them on the snout with a club, or piercing them with a spear. Sometimes, however, the seal goes to sleep on the surface of the open water. Then the approach is made in a similar manner by means of the kayak, and the animal is struck with a harpoon. But a single blow does not always kill a seal, especially if it be a large one, and the blow has been ill-directed. In such cases the animal would undoubtedly make his escape, and carry the harpoon along with it, which would be a serious loss to the owner, who does not obtain such weapons without great difficulty. To prevent this, the Esquimaux uses a contrivance similar to that employed in the capture of the whale, – that is, he attaches a float or buoy to his harpoon by means of a cord, and this so impedes the passage of the seal through the water, that it can neither dive nor swim to any very great distance. The float is usually a walrus bladder inflated in the ordinary way, and wherever the seal may go, the float betrays its track, enabling the Esquimaux to follow it in his shuttle-shaped kayak, and pierce it again with a surer aim.

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