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THE BLACK TRACKERS

Wonderful Keeness of These Natives of Australia.

USED TO TRACK CRIMINALS.

These Men Are Veritable Bloodhounds and Have a Natural Instinct For Running Down Desperadoes Who Are Fleeting From Justice.

A criminal in Australia knows that his chances for escape are nearly hopeless if a "tracker" is put upon his trail within a day after the crime is discovered. A "tracker" is a native black man having a natural instinct for running down criminals fleeing from justice. These men are veritable bloodhounds, and their strange power is possessed by no other race in the world.

So implicit is the confidence felt in them by the police that when a black starts out upon a man hunt the officer who goes with him merely follows in his wake. He does not question him or in any way interfere with him, but, leading his own horse, allows the guide to go in whatever direction he pleases, no matter how apparently unreasonable his course may seem.

The most successful trackers are in Queensland, near the edge of New South Wales. They will travel any distance, animated by no feeling of hatred for their quarry, but only desirous of proving their expertness. The reward they ask is absurdly small for the long and difficult trails. A few shillings or some cheap bracelets, rings, and so on, quite satisfy them. They have no idea of the value of money. Rum is their great weakness.

Once a tracker was employed to locate some valuable trees for a timber man. He had to travel some forty miles through a forest so dense that it was necessary to cut his way through with his tomahawk. All he asked for was a bottle of rum, while the timber merchant derived over \$2,000 from the sale of the trees.

The following description of a man hunt will convey a clear idea of the dangers and hardships to be endured:

In this particular case the tracker was a splendid specimen of manhood. The usual loin garments of kangaroo skin he had exchanged for a light covering of cotton cloth provided by the police. He led a horse, so as to make time in the open country districts where the runaway's footsteps could be seen from a horse. The hunt was very earnest, because the fugitive had stolen some cattle. In Australia the crime of cattle stealing is most severely dealt with and considered a serious offense.

The offender was a well seasoned bushman, cunning and acquainted with the tactics of the trackers. Furthermore, he had two days' start of his pursuers.

To accompany a chase like this is awesome, the utter silence and desolation of the woods is so depressing. Then, too, the trails are deceptive, often leading to a deserted wood camp beneath a foliage so dense that it is impossible even to catch a glimpse of the sky. Darkness closes in very quickly in the mountain regions, and by nightfall the tracker and his employer were glad to reach an "accommodation house," or rancher's home, where such as these were usually welcomed and allowed to put up for the night. At this house the officer tried to hear tidings of his man, but no one had seen him.

All the next day the black fellow led along as swiftly as possible. The way was extremely rough, and mile after mile was covered through wild silences until a stranger would surely think the guide was playing a losing game. At no time could they ride, and it was with great difficulty that they reached a sort of clearing, where the horses were tied and camp struck for the night. Tearing huge strips of bark from the trees and wrapping blankets around them, each lay on the concave surface of one for a bed and rested.

At noon the next day a bushman's cabin was reached, and there the tired horses were tethered. The hunters then proceeded on foot. Another night in the forest, and the fourth day found these intrepid hunters making their way through underbrush peculiar to Australia, called "lawyers and barristers," because its thorns and brambles catch one at every turn. Once the guide hesitated, turned back and struck off in another direction down an embankment, the rest tumbling after him.

A wild chase that must have been! Two white men following the apparently mad actions of a black fellow into places so remote that it would

have been impossible to find the way out of them alone, but such is the confidence in that country in the faithfulness and ability of a tracker. He now crawled for the greater part on his hands and knees, minutely examining twigs and branches for signs of a freshly broken passageway for the fugitive. He was about ten feet ahead of the others when he gave a subdued exclamation of delight.

"I catch white feller quick!" he said and pointed to a scrap of cloth clinging to a broken twig. Four hours more and a river was reached. There in the damp earth of the bank two footprints were plainly seen.

The tracker leaped into the river and struck out for the opposite side. Emerging upon the other bank, he ran, dripping, for twenty feet or so, following footprints that had again stopped at the water's edge.

Then the tracker paused. He was plainly puzzled. What had become of the cattle thief? Had he recrossed the river or swam down as far as he could and landed on either bank, then struck

into the woods again? After sharply examining the ground the troubled guide swam back and landed a few yards below his party. By his actions they saw that he had found the tracks again. The criminal had indeed crossed the river, but where had he gone after that?

Trust a tracker to solve riddles of that sort! Suddenly he began uncovering the leaves and twigs between him and the other two men until he reached them. They were sitting beneath a huge eucalyptus tree.

"White feller no fool black feller!" he said, smiling, wet and breathless. Then it was seen that the fugitive had carefully covered up his tracks by walking backward. Strange to relate, these tracks terminated under the very tree where the party were seated. But apparently the man hunt was finished. The game had vanished into space!

The tracker dashed into a thicket and hastily secured a strong, pliable vine, used by the natives to scale tree trunks too smooth to climb. This he threw about the tree and began to ascend it. The others looked on in astonishment. Up went the black until thirty feet in the air; then those below noticed that the main trunk of the tree had been broken off years before, forming a crotch for the new branches that had sprung up on either side.

A most astonishing thing happened. Reaching down into the hollow of the half dead tree trunk, the tracker seized something, at the same time shouting to the officer beneath: "Boss, boss, I catch white feller! He play possum!"

Out of the opening appeared a man's head, and a more wretched object could never have been seen. He was tumbled, dirty, gaunt, half starved.

In due course he paid the penalty of his crime. He said that, knowing a tracker would be put upon his trail, he had hoped to give him the impression that he had been drowned while swimming the river.

Trackers have a horror of traveling after dark, being constantly in fear of meeting the bunyip, a fearful monster with glaring eyes, which they believe to be the spirit of an old aboriginal king who roams around the swampy land at night to catch black men. You can frighten trackers half out of their wits by telling them you will send the bunyip after them. They also believe that a giant lives on mountain tops, waiting to kill them with a club; hence they never sleep on top of a mountain or near a swamp, always pitching their brush tents, or mimis, near a dry and level spot. Their only religious belief is that a big god who has been asleep for ages will one day awaken and eat up the whole world.—Pearson's Weekly.

BIDED HIS TIME.

Patience and Persistence of the East Indian Trader.

The patience of certain Indian traders is almost beyond belief. However, as a virtue is seldom a simple and single hearted affair, but usually consists of a mixture of several motives, it is safe to conclude that greed mingled with a good share of obstinacy goes to make up the measure of these peddlers' patience. It thus becomes only a passive form of the persistence which belongs to the skillful trader everywhere. A. D. McCormick in "An Artist in the Himalayas" gives an account of a transaction in which he had a part.

He was camping in the mountain region, and merchants were continually coming to his tent in the hope of disposing of their wares. They did not seem to mind if their goods were not bought.

"Only just look at this beautiful work, sahib," said one.

"I am too busy," replied Mr. McCormick.

quick. "Oh, I don't mind. I'll wait." At the end of the day there was the trader.

"I want to show sahib this beautiful ring."

"I don't want any ring," insisted "sahib." "Go!"

"But, sahib, I sell this ring very cheap."

"I tell you I don't want it!"

"I wait, sahib (highness). If sahib only see the ring he will buy."

The next morning he was seated about 100 yards from the tent, gazing into space. Two hours later he was in the same position. At nightfall he was still there. Mr. McCormick could stand it no longer. "Show me the ring!" he called. "What do you want for it?"

"Oh, sahib, it is a beautiful ring! I made it myself!"

"Here, you old scoundrel, this isn't a stone—it's a piece of glass!"

"Oh, sahib, e-stone is good e-stone. Gli-llass, no!"

"Well, what do you want for it, you swindler?"

"Fifty rupees."

"Make tracks quick! I wouldn't give more than ten!"

The next day the merchant reappeared, offering the ring for 45 rupees; the day after he came down to twenty; the third his price was ten.

"Sahib said he would give ten!" he insisted.

Mr. McCormick finally in desperation handed out 10 rupees, and the trader went away smiling, having fairly bored his way to success.

Potter Wasps at Work.

The family eumenidae, or solitary wasps, contain some curious workers. Some are miners and dig tiny tunnels in the earth; some are carpenters and cut chambers in wood and then divide the space into chambers by partitions of mud; some build oval or globelike mud nests on branches or twigs. This home may be partitioned into several tiny rooms, into which are put various small insects captured by the mother wasp and upon which the young wasps feed.—St. Nicholas.

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A Horseman's Getup, 1662.

"If the sword be not bought," writes Sir James Verney, "I had much rather have one according to the mode, and the rather because a black one is more agreeable to my phancy. I hope you have given my tailor full directions about the belt, for I can by no means trust to his judgment. As for the saddle you mention, I am very much obliged to yourself for borrowing and to Sir Rich: Temple for lending it, if he knows for whom it is, but my fears is that I shall not become a saddle of that worth, if it belongs to him as Kt. of the Bath, and I question whether I may have it for both assises. As for the horse I have at Sutton, I fear he will be too high for a low fellow to get upon; if so, I shall be hold to send for yours. I am unwilling to look like a jackanapes on horseback. You mention topps to be used, which I suppose are to be worn upon my legs; if so, I fear there will be so much topp, as there will be but little bottom to be seen. My legs all are short enough in conscience already, and if the fashion must needs make them shorter I must strut it out as well as I can."

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