

Johnny Lifu, The Bunya Terror Also Known As “The Bunya Blackfellow” And “The Bunya Black”.

1/10/1889

A deputation of residents of the Bunya district, consisting of Messrs. G. Biggs, J. Draper, F. Graham, E. Collins, T. Broad, W. Weber; and J. Leathern, waited upon the Chief Secretary yesterday, and were introduced by Mr. Drake, M.L.A., who explained that they wished the assistance of the Government in tracking down and arresting a man who was wandering about that district-supposed to be a kanaka gone wild-and who was giving a great deal of trouble, and was suspected of having committed certain crimes.

Mr. MOREHEAD said that Mr. Agnew, M.L. A., had spoken to him about the matter. The police, he took it, were doing all they could to try and apprehend the man. The circumstances were, he understood, rather peculiar, no one being able to give a description of the individual.

Mr. DRAKE stated that the son of Mr. Poultney, saw-miller at Samford, had been assaulted, and very probably would be able to give a description of his assailant.

Mr. MOREHEAD: But there is no evidence to show that the young man's assailant and the individual who has been making depredations in that neighbourhood are one and the same person.

Mr. DRAKE did not think there was any proof of that, but the evidence was overwhelming that some person was wandering about in that district committing thefts, &c.

Mr. BIGGS reminded Mr. Morehead that about two years ago a little girl named Bridget Baker was criminally assaulted when returning from school, and her little brother ran home and told that a blackfellow had come out of the scrub and taken his sister away.

A year after that the little girl was murdered, and up to the present time the whole affair was enveloped in mystery.

In the interval between the committal of these two crimes, fowls had disappeared from various places, workmen's tools had been stolen, and depredations too numerous to mention had been committed, and on two occasions tracks identical in appearance had been discovered in the bush.

On Tuesday, the 24th September, young Mr. Poultney was in search of timber in the scrub, when he was suddenly confronted by a blackfellow, who bade him good morning and made some remark about a snug camp. As soon as Mr. Poultney turned his back he was struck on the shoulder with some hard substance-he could not say what-for the young man made off as fast as he could. He informed the police the next morning and accompanied the constable to the place. On making a search they came upon a small camp which had evidently not been long vacated, and about it they found bones and feathers of fowls, and hidden in logs and other places wearing apparel,

house linen, tools, and articles which had been stolen during the past two years or more. That being the case, the people in the vicinity had considered that the Government should take some special measures to try and place the man, whoever he was, in safe custody.

There was something approaching- to a reign of terror in the district, especially as some of the children had to walk long distances to school. They ventured to suggest that the Government should offer a substantial reward for the capture of the blackfellow.

Mr. MOREHEAD did not see how a reward could be offered for the capture of a person who could not be described, and who had not been convicted of any crime. That would be a most unusual course to take: and he did not think that the offering of a reward would lead to the man being put under arrest any sooner than he would otherwise be.

Mr. Biggs said that the country was a wild and heavily-timbered one, and they thought that if a reward were offered civilians might be induced to join in hunting the man down.

Mr. MOREHEAD thought they ought to do so without any reward being held out. There would be no difficulty in getting black trackers from other parts of the colony to assist the police who were stationed in that district. He would go into the matter with the Commissioner of Police.

Mr. DRAKE said that Sergeant Primrose, who was in charge of the police in the Bunya district, was an excellent officer, but had not as yet succeeded in tracking the man.

Mr. Biggs mentioned that the day after the blackfellow was last seen, the Bunya church was burned down.

Mr. MOREHEAD said there was no proof that the person who set fire to the church, supposing such a thing was done, had any connection with the man suspected of committing the thefts. A reward could of course only be paid upon conviction. He would consult with the Commissioner of Police, and see what steps could be taken to rid the Bunya district of such a troublesome visitor.

3/10/1889

Acting under instructions received from Sergeant Anderson, of Sandgate, Mounted-constable M'Carthy made an unsuccessful search for the Bunya blackfellow on Monday.

The camp and several other evidences of the neighbourhood of this nomadic miscreant were easily found, but the individual himself was absolutely wanting.

It is said that the police possess ample justification for the arrest of the wanderer whenever and wherever they may find him, as several small articles missed from certain Bunya settlements, such as tools, have been found in the exile's camp, so that he is virtually "wanted " on suspicion of theft.

4/10/1889

The latest particulars respecting the Bunya blackfellow are to the effect that he was last seen about three miles from Samford, and within a mile and a half of Mr. John Fitzgerald's farm.

The country in this neighbourhood is very rugged, and the rough basalt ridges are clothed thickly with brushwood and patches of scrub, almost if not absolutely impenetrable in many places.

In these wilds the outlaw has dwelt intermittently for about two years.

There seems to be no doubt in the minds, of the Bunya residents as to the exile's original colour; and he is popularly supposed to be a kanaka.

His description tallies with that of an unemployed kanaka who was living with one or two of his countrymen in Mary-street for some time, and whose vagaries, mental and otherwise, occasionally excited suspicion.

His last camp is situated in a thick wattle scrub, and does not differ materially from the habitation of the ordinary aboriginal.

Excessive caution (stealth, in fact) is characteristic of all his movements.

His camp has been approached by a pathway of logs in order that he might leave no footmarks on the ground.

His journeyings to an adjacent stream of water have been similarly effected.

His effects, or rather the product of his many depredations, were discovered in hollow logs all about the locality.

Among the things identified as having been stolen from sundry settlers are tin dishes, maize, a mortising axe, two American axes, and a 2in. auger.

In one log chopped open by the police were found a white tablecloth, two sheets, a dress, and a quantity of female underclothing.

Quite close to the camp a tree, 18in. in diameter, has been felled by boring auger holes across it.

This, singular bushranger has evidently lived on the fowls, butter, eggs, and maize which he has abundantly appropriated from the various farms for many months past, and his capture will undoubtedly remove what is at present perpetual source of terror to the district.

18/10/1889

Another incident has reached us with regard to the Bunya blackfellow.

It appears that a teaspoon has been found, among other "portable property," in one of this nomad's camps. The teaspoon bears the monogram of Mr. C. Daniell's, Imperial Hotel.

In explanation of this circumstances Mr. Daniell informs us that a black man a South Sea Islander, he thinks used to visit his hotel some seven or eight months ago for the purpose of selling ferns, and stated on several occasions that he came from Bunya. The man had a scar immediately under his right eye, spoke English fairly well, and had a high appreciation of the value of money.

Just in connection with the latter circumstance there appears one discrepancy, which is quite out of harmony with the reported career of the Bunya marauder.

It is stated that some time ago the Bunya blackfellow stole a pair of blankets from a Bunya settler named Richardson. In the blankets 18s. in silver were rolled up. The "Bunya terror" speedily annexed the blankets but carefully deposited the cash on a shelf or a ledge on the wall.

18/10/1889

The attention of the House was directed by Mr. Grimes to that extraordinary personage who has now become so famous under the dramatically euphonious appellation of the Bunya Blackfellow.

The member for Oxley quoted a paragraph from the Courier, which stated that Mr. A. Meston was about to start in search of this human will-o'-the-wisp, the mystery of whose appearances is only equalled by that of his disappearances.

Mr. Grimes especially noted the statement that Mr. Meston "assumes the right of dealing with the blackfellow, if he finds him, in any way he pleases, the propriety of the proceedings to be discussed afterwards," and displayed great indignation thereat. He said it was astounding that the Commissioner of Police had accepted on these terms the services of a man who had on more than one occasion boasted of the number of blacks who had fallen victims to his rifle, and in the name of humanity he called upon the Government to step in and prevent Mr. Meston from going forth armed cap-a-pie to take this blackfellow, and probably shoot him.

Mr. Morehead did not get even a little bit hysterical over the matter. He calmly said that if Mr. Meston took any such drastic measures for "dispensing" this blackfellow he would probably be hanged for his trouble; but the Chief Secretary did not seem to entertain any serious apprehensions as to the safety of this baal budgeree Bunya blackfellow's life, and from the tone of his remarks it was inferred that he expects either that the hero of the Bellenden-Ker will come leading the sable desperado in like a pig on a string or else that he won't find him at all.

Mr. Hodgkinson said he did not believe that Mr. Meston would take his little gun with him at all. When he comes within "cooey" of the blackfellow he will just fire off a few polysyllabic words at him, and these will bring him to a standstill as effectively as a privateer's cannon shot across her bows will stop the progress of a peaceful merchantman. Having come up with his quarry, Mr. Meston's next procedure, according to the member for Burke, will be to read to him in clear and distinct tones, and with appropriate gesture, his description of the Barron Falls. This of necessity will bring the poor creature into a quiescent state, and with lamblike mildness he will follow his captor into Brisbane, give up all his vagrom-habits, take the temperance pledge, and eventually become a Sunday school superintendent and a marvel of morality.

With regard to Mr. Grimes's charge against Mr. Meston, that he had boasted of the number of blacks whom he had slaughtered, it was not long, before an answer came.

Mr. Hamilton, using as strong language as Parliamentary rules permit, plainly told Mr. Grimes that it was utterly untrue, and adding that if he was assured that Mr. Grimes was as humane a man as he knew Mr. Meston to be he would entertain a better opinion of the member for Oxley than he did.

Mr. Hodgkinson also stood up for Mr. Meston, and declared his conviction that that gentleman's character was not anything like the description of it, which Mr. Grimes had given.

After this some members proceeded to inveigh against the incapacity which, they said, the police had shown, and Mr. Smyth, who gave some interesting particulars about the capture of several of the old-time bushrangers, strongly argued that the force should consist mainly of native Australians, who were accustomed to bush work, instead of Irishmen, who were not suited for the duties which they were frequently called upon to perform in Queensland.

Mr. Agnew, however, maintained that the officer who had charge of the search that has been so far unsuccessfully carried out was in every way a competent and trustworthy man.

Then the matter dropped.

24/10/1889

On Saturday last senior-sergeant Martin drove me out to where some of the police were camped on Cabbage-tree Creek, a distance of about twelve miles from Brisbane.

This was the locality in which the mysterious kanaka had been camped for some considerable time, probably eighteen months or a couple of years.

Near here were found the camps, which had formed his base of operations, and from whence he sallied forth periodically to rob hen roosts and dairies and selectors' gardens. Near here was the scene of the murder of Bridget Baker, a crime for which the kanaka is supposed to be responsible.

On arrival at Collin's selection we found all the police out on search duty except Constable Toomey, whom the commissioner had deputed to accompany me on my tour in the surrounding country. From here Sergeant Martin returned to Brisbane.

Learning from Toomey that the kanaka was robbing selectors sixteen miles away in the Basin Pocket, under Mount Samson, I decided to start over in that direction at once.

Removing my clothes, I put on a pair of loose-fitting merino drawers and skin-tight merino shirt, light sandshoes, and started, armed with a reliable Tranter's revolver, specially granted for the occasion by Gartside and Son, and proved by me on trial to be fairly certain death to any two-legged or four-legged animal inside of a hundred yards.

In addition I carried one of my favourite scrub knives, a weapon quite as effective as a sword at close quarters. "We went across a series of steep spurs and deep ravines, rough quartz and gravel country covered by bloodwood, spotted gum, she-oak, and stringy bark, over the head of the South Pine River until we arrived at Eaton's selection Cedar Creek.

Here Mrs. Eaton kindly invited us to have something to eat, and we afterwards followed up the creek to Mr. Owen's selection, the chief camp of the police in search of the kanaka, and arrived there in grand form after a rough walk of twelve miles.

All the police, including Sergeant O'Loan, Constable Forrest, Detective Johnson, and two black trackers were away over at Glover's, about six miles distant, the scene of an extensive robbery the day before.

In the morning Toomey and I started with the first dawn of daylight, and after a rough walk of six miles arrived at Glover's at 6 o'clock.

About an hour afterwards Sergeant O'Loan, Detective Johnson, and the two trackers arrived from a neighbouring selection.

I was informed that they had followed the tracks for a mile and a-half the previous day, and were now off to continue on the trail.

Mr. Glover's house was robbed some time before daylight on Friday morning.

The kanaka had entered a back door opening on to a skillion storeroom, out of which another door opened into a dairy. Out of the dairy he took 20lb. of fresh butter, and out of the storeroom 70lb. of flour, 60lb. of sugar, half a blanket, five pumpkins, and sundry small articles. Out of the kitchen he took a small saucepan. On the east side of the house he opened a bedroom window, put his hand in and took out half-a pound of tobacco and a box of caps, leaving untouched a purse containing £9, lying on the dressing-table.

It appears he has a soul above money, and never was known to include this base and sordid article in any of his robberies.

The box of caps he left on the grindstone outside.

The extremely delicate nature of his movements will be understood when we find him entering the two rooms, at least three or four times, and opening a bed room window, and robbing it while young Glover was calmly sleeping on the bed.

The total weight of the articles actually taken away, including four pumpkins and a gramma, was about 215lb.

About fifty yards from the house was a spot where he had put down the flour, and evidently adjusted the whole of his swag to make it more convenient to carry.

Glover's house stands about 100 yards from the edge of thick scrub extending over a series of steep spurs on to the head of Cedar Creek, and thence down the valley and along the watershed of that creek to the South Pine River.

At the back of the house a timber track runs away for a mile and a half into the scrub.

Along this road the trackers professed to have found the kanaka's tracks.

Relying on their statement, and unfortunately making no search myself at the starting point, I accompanied the whole party to where the trackers turned off the road up through thick scrub out on to a forest spur and found themselves at fault.

Not caring to interfere with Johnson and the blackboys I took Toomey and went away along the spur, turned down into the scrub towards the creek, and crossed and

recrossed the gorges in various directions in the vague hope of intercepting tracks running to the east or south.

We came to a deserted hut in which the kanaka had camped one wet night, and made his fire just beside the bunk. Out of this hut he had taken all the battens on which he had slept and carried them off. Round this hut was a considerable area of felled scrub, over which had grown a dense rank undergrowth, which I traversed in all directions, the thin drawers not saving me very effectively from the stinging-tree and the thorn apples.

We followed down a branch of the creek, along ravines, through thick scrub, and over loose rocks, until we reached the junction, and then returned up a long spur to the hut in time to save ourselves from a very heavy thunderstorm, during which rain fell in torrents for about an hour.

We were joined at the hut by Sergeant O'Loan, Detective Johnson, Forrest, and the two trackers.

When the worst of the rain was over we travelled across country to Owen's on Cedar Creek.

The trackers had never recovered the tracks on the forest spur, and had been travelling all day at random.

Before starting that morning from Glover's I saw at a glance that the trackers were worse than useless.

One of them is an ancient patriarch familiar to Queen-street citizens as a collector of stray pence, and a pathetic appealer for substantial sympathy on the ground of being one of the last surviving monarchs of a rapidly expiring race. His chief diet for some years has consisted chiefly of rum. After a month of enforced sobriety he might possibly detect an odd track or two of an elephant across a ploughed field. The other was a younger and more active black, whose tracking powers were equal to following the trail of a timber-waggon along a muddy road. These two talented myalls were about as effective warriors on the war trail as two old women with sandy-blight and smoked spectacles. Moreover, they moved along in mortal dread of the kanaka, not daring to walk ten yards away from Johnson.

Believing them to have led Johnson entirely astray, I started next morning alone, followed the range round until opposite the basin, and struck straight across the south to Glover's.

There was, of course, only a very remote chance indeed of finding a track after a heavy thunderstorm and a wet night. My opinion was that the kanaka had simply walked up the timber track to the forest spur and back to mislead his pursuers, and that he had either skirted the scrub and entered it at another point, or gone straight across the open valley into the scrubs at the foot of Mount Samson.

Had I looked for his tracks the previous day, before any rain fell, instead of being misled by the blacks, I should certainly have found them and never left them until the rain came on.

In any case I should have made sure of the direction he travelled. I crossed the valley to the Mount Samson range, skirted the spurs of that range to the head of Cobble Creek, ascended the eastern ridge, followed that ridge until it entered the scrubs at the head of Cedar Creek, and came round on to the track emerging behind Glover's house.

On arrival there I found Constables Leslie and Perkins, who had discovered the four pumpkins and a gramma on the steep bank of a creek behind the cultivation about 200 yards from the house.

I followed the fence round and found two tracks, one where the bare foot had flattened out a piece of rotten wood, and the other where one heel had left an indentation in the side of a cow track beside a small raspberry bush. I was, therefore, correct in my belief that he had doubled back, and either entered the scrub elsewhere or gone across the basin to the opposite range.

It was impossible to follow the track as the grass had completely recovered itself, and all other marks were washed out by the rain. Had another tour round the scrubs behind Glover's, and returned there at night to camp.

These scrubs today were full of leeches, and my drawers from the knees down were red with blood. Ticks are also very numerous, the most poisonous I ever met with. Constable Forrest took over twenty off himself during one day.

On Tuesday morning I started across to the Samson Range accompanied by young Glover, a strapping hardy youth of 18 years, ascended the range behind Michael's selection, passed right along the summit, over Mount Samson, where on the highest point I cut my name on a board nailed on a stump, beside the signal pole, and followed the range right round to the head of Cedar Creek, over all the peaks.

This gave me a complete knowledge of the whole country.

It was no holiday excursion.

No trace or sign of the kanaka.

Of course once the tracks were lost they could only be recovered by mere chance.

We were not even aware of the way he went and might be searching for him at the head of Cedar Creek, and the artful dodger many miles away.

He carried off enough provisions to last him six weeks at least, and he could afford to remain in close concealment for that period.

One rare and splendid chance of capturing or taking this kanaka was unfortunately thrown away.

He had robbed a selector familiarly known as "Harry," living on the crest of a hill two miles to the northeast of Owens'.

He carried away about a hundredweight of groceries and beef, and took all down through the scrub to his camp, about a mile and a-half in the ravine below.

This camp was accidentally found by Constables Forrest and Toomey about 9 o'clock in the morning.

The kanaka heard them coming, let the tent fall flat on the ground, and then left abruptly.

Forrest remained on watch and Toomey went away for Detective Johnson.

During his absence the kanaka came cautiously back, but saw Forrest before reaching the camp and vanished in the scrub, Forrest making a hopeless effort to overtake him.

In the evening Forrest, Johnson, and Toomey waited for his return. He came back with great caution, saw Johnson, threw up his hands and ran, two of the police firing at him without any result. He evidently sustained no injury, as a day or two later he committed the robbery at Glover's.

He is evidently an active powerful man, not at all likely to be taken alive unless surprised when asleep.

He is profoundly cunning, and devotes his whole reasoning faculties to the planning of fresh robberies and schemes for evading capture. At present the locality he inhabits is merely a subject of wild conjecture.

In the absence of tracks his discovery must be purely an accident. Perhaps not a sign of him will be found until he is driven to commit a fresh robbery.

Two first-class trackers, the best obtainable, ought to be sent out to replace the two aboriginal fossils who are at present simply misleading the police.

He commands a practically unlimited area of cover among the adjoining ranges.

In diet he is rather an epicure, being a connoisseur in butter and fat pullets.

In one of his camps were found the remains of over a hundred fowls. He is fond of fowls, butter, eggs, pumpkins, sugar, rice, and jams.

The police have performed their duty conscientiously, and a lot of very hard work has been done by Detective Johnson especially, while Sergeant O'Loan and Constables Toomey, Forrest, Leslie, and others had their fair share of what is really very unpleasant and disheartening work in by no means agreeable country.

It is my duty to mention here the genial hospitality received in the households of Mr. Owens and Mr. Glover, and the courtesy everywhere shown to me by the police, particularly Sergeant O'Loan.

In the absence of all tracks I was personally able to do no more than four days' rough work, when urgent business demanded my return to town, but I hope to go back in a day or two and make a further effort to obtain a personal interview with the mysterious kanaka who has, for at least three years, defied all attempts at capture.

In conclusion, I have to express my grateful thanks to Mr. Commissioner Seymour for the very kind and graceful manner in which he assisted me to obtain even this amount of reliable information regarding the "Bunya Terror."

25/10/1889

The Bunya blackfellow has obtained another respite.

Urgent business having demanded Mr. Meston's return to town, and the recall of the "Tranter's revolver" being thereby occasioned, that terrible kanaka will doubtless revert

to his quondam pastime of playing hide-and-seek with the police force and diminishing school attendances in his neighbourhood.

Constabulary duty in this Bunya case would seem to be rather enjoyable. Camping out in the pleasant Pine River country at this season of the year, and consuming such dairy dainties as have been left in the district by the object of all the hubbub, are methods of guarding the peace without being unduly aggressive, which must be eminently agreeable.

True, the cares and responsibilities incurred by the presence of the regal aboriginal relics indicated, by Mr. Meston must somewhat detract from the aforesaid delights, while lesser evils, in the shape of ticks and leeches, are, it would seem, always ready to cling to any temporary means of livelihood.

But the former are probably too aged and feeble to initiate any very violent exercise, while the latter may be avoided by keeping out of the scrub. The blackfellow, moreover, seems himself to have taken to the scrub, and it might be just as well, perhaps, to leave him to the ticks and leeches, which, in the absence of Mr. Meston, should be able to keep him on the move.

One point worth noting is that two of the police are reported to have fired on one occasion at the fugitive "without any result."

The inquiry at once suggests itself that had there been any "result," such as the passage of a kanaka-spirit to regions of unlimited poultry, what would have been the position of his slaughterers.

Mr. Meston, said Mr. Morehead, would probably be hanged for such a thing. The police, however, do not appear to dread a like fate.

Is it the law in this country that an unrecognisable and unidentified black man may be "potted" by the police on suspicion?

Mr. Meston's trip has probably been only apparently fruitless.

The sight of a man dressed in the elaborate Bellenden-Ker expedition fashion, and obviously looking for sugarcane the kanaka surely recognised the cane knife-must have been sufficient to raise doubts in his mind as to the capacity of Bunya for two terrors.

It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the scared Pacific Islander is now far from the late scene of his depredations, and heading, it may even be, for a brooding solitude as remote as the Morehead Cataract.

29/10/1889

The police are evidently not relaxing their efforts to capture the "Bunya Terror," as we learn that Sub-inspector White, of the Native Police Force, who is at present stationed in Brisbane, left town on Sunday for the Bunya district, taking with him three regular black trackers and a blackboy from the North.

Constable Holdway has also gone with the party.

Sub-inspector White was formerly stationed on the Palmer River, where he worked for eight years, and is a thorough bushman.

The police have formed pickets round the locality frequented by the kanaka, and Sub-inspector White and his trackers will strike into the heart of the scrub.

It is thought that with his knowledge of the bush and the services of these trained trackers; something will shortly be heard of the darkie who has been wanted so long.

2/11/1889

This interesting information concerning the Bunya blackfellow is kindly supplied by Mr. A. Meston, who received the following letter last night from one of the selectors:- "The police had another trial run after the nigger, and were again unsuccessful.

Inspector J. White and his boys are up here now camped in Lawson's hut.

On Monday evening one of the trackers found the nigger's camp in the scrub not far from Christie Smith's hut, where you took shelter during the thunderstorm.

He had the palings taken from the hut laid flat on the ground and covered with pine bark. There was a hunk of roasted calf in the camp, evidently from a calf he had killed, as a cow that had lost her calf was wandering about the range.

Early next morning, White, Toomey, Johnston and the blackboys, with some others, started on a search and soon after one of the blackboys saw the "Terror" walking down the bed of the creek carrying a bag which he dropped at once and bolted off, the blackboys and White and others in hot pursuit.

The chase was over in a few minutes.

One blackboy made a grand spurt, but a vine caught him round the neck and threw him on his back and all the others were hopelessly out of it. The nigger made some grand dashes through the scrub for liberty.

Inspector White had his back slightly injured in the scramble. The bag dropped by the 'Terror' contained a shirt stolen from men splitting palings on the ridge, besides a few yams and potatoes.

Later on two of the police, who were on lookout duty at Smith's hut, saw him bolt off the track into the scrub, but it was too dark to follow. Another special effort will be made to capture him.

There is a strong party of police here besides Inspector White, Detective Johnson, and the black boys."

To this letter Mr. Meston adds the following remarks:- "Smith's hut is a small one-roomed humpy, standing in open forest on the crest of a ridge surrounded by thick scrub.

Here Constable Toomey and myself took refuge from a thunderstorm, and close at hand is the dense undergrowth through which I made a special search.

At times I was probably within 100 yards, or even less, of the dark-skinned hermit to whom I was so painfully anxious for an introduction.

It is idle now to speculate on the probable result that would have followed if he had given me the same opportunity he has given the police. Doubtless the police will do

their best, and now that they have fixed his locality and obtained his tracks, the reign of the "Bunya Terror" should terminate suddenly on an early date.

I am only, of course, basing this prediction on the assumption that the 'Terror' is a fool.

If he is not a fool he will place at once in the shortest possible time the greatest possible distance between himself and his late private residence, by breaking all previous records in a bee line for the remote recesses of the Main Range."

5/11/1889

Two instances, exemplifying conditions of Queensland colonial life, supply its ludicrous and tragic sides.

Within twenty miles of the capital, Brisbane, containing, with its suburbs, a population of 70,000 people-a half-crazy kanaka, known as the Bunya Terror, haunts an outlying patch of scrub, steals fowls, flour, and small needs of life, and generally keeps up a constant panic in the minds of the scattered settlers residing in the neighbourhood.

No proof is given that he has outstepped the borderline of petty theft, but as a large majority of the southern population of the colony have never seen a wild black, they invest this vagrant lunatic with the horrors of their hare-like souls, and demand his capture.

Quite a formidable squad of police have been in pursuit of him for some time, so far without success, though they occasionally drop across a camp, with the ashes of the fire yet warm and the grass bedding he reclines on rising from the recent pressure of his body.

Of quite another kind is the tragedy just enacted upon the extreme northwestern boundary of the colony.

There a young half caste named Flick, but 17 years of age, confined for some minor offence, escaped custody, took to the bush, and, being closely pursued by the police, ensconced himself in a hut on a station belonging to a well-known explorer, Mr. Frank Hann.

Then ensued a murderous encounter, in which Flick shot the senior constable in charge of the apprehending party dead, wounded Mr. Hann, and escaped during a storm which occurred in the night following.

With daylight, Flick's tracks were taken up, a second encounter ensued in which a black tracker was wounded - it is believed fatally - and ultimately the desperado's body was found with bullets.

These gentry in Queensland have a short shrift.

21/11/1889

Sub-inspector White, who has been searching for the Bunya blackfellow, came into town yesterday.

He reports that the blackfellow has been seen, but not by him or his party, and is still in the district.

Sub-inspector White will go out again to make further search.

30/11/1889

The Bunya Terror has been stealing again, the larceny being as usual of provisions.

Sub inspector White and Sergeant Primrose saw the blackfellow some days ago, but he darted into a scrub and was out of sight in a moment.

12/12/1889

The South Sea Islander, who, during the past three years, established what seems to have been little less than a reign of terror in the Bunya district, was captured yesterday morning, and brought into Brisbane and lodged in the lockup. The kanaka made a desperate resistance, and was considerably knocked about before he was handcuffed and subdued.

The news of his capture excited considerable interest, and a large number of people seeing the police bringing in their prisoner followed the cart to the gates, anxious to obtain a glimpse of the "Bunya Terror" a sobriquet recently conferred on the islander.

The prisoner, who gives the name of Johnny, was first noticed in the Bunya district some three years ago, and many complaints were made of his predatory visits to settlers' houses, particularly during the absence of the owners. Of late he has become more troublesome, and on more than one occasion violence has been shown to settlers.

The uneasy feeling in the district grew into one of absolute terror on the part of women and children. This was augmented by the suggestion that the black may have been the murderer of a little girl named Baker, who about eighteen months ago was killed in the district, and whose slayer has not yet been brought to justice.

Three months ago the frequency of robberies and the excitement in the district led to the dispatch of a few policemen to the Bunya, but owing to the nature of the country the islander was able to avoid capture without difficulty.

The residents of the Bunya represented the condition of affairs to the Colonial Secretary, and additional police and trackers were sent out, but the latter proved incompetent, and Mr. A. Meston then volunteered to try and effect a capture, but after four days hard work in the mountains was forced to the conclusion that the black was not to be caught by any systematic search, but that with patient patrolling he would probably be found and captured by surprise or rindown.

On Mr. Meston's return, six weeks ago, the trackers were recalled and Sub-inspector White, who has had eight years of native police service north of Cooktown, and is one of the smartest officers in the force, was sent out to conduct the search. Mr. White took with him a couple of native troopers, whose qualifications as trackers he had often tested, and with the white police made a regular patrol of the district.

Mr. White soon arrived at the same conclusion as Mr. Meston, that patience was necessary in the undertaking.

He found the country very rough and scrubby, and the ticks and leeches very bad. It was advisable, he thought, to have a couple of kanakas with his troopers, and for the last fortnight he has had two good boys out.

All search seemed futile, however, until Tuesday, when the troopers found what was evidently the camp of the man they were after.

It was between Cedar Creek and Branch Creek, in an unsheltered place, with a fire on each side. Mr. White laid his plans carefully to make a capture.

The locality was abandoned until night, but when the moon rose he and his troopers went quietly back, and at daylight crept up to the camp and rushed it.

The camp was empty; the fires were out.

The islander had not slept there that night.

Disappointed, Mr. White returned to camp, about two miles distant, sending the troopers round by another route. He was surprised and pleased to find that the troopers and the two kanakas had in returning found the object of the search and made a capture.

The captors state that some time after leaving Mr. White they saw the islander camped under a log, and evidently asleep. They crept up to him, but before he could be secured he heard his pursuers, and sprang to his feet. In an instant a rush was made for him, and he was caught. He had a knife and tomahawk in his belt, and drew the knife, but before he could use it one of the boys hit him over the hand and the weapon dropped to the ground. He then tried to draw the tomahawk, but could not get at it. A desperate struggle followed, the islander fighting fiercely for freedom, biting, kicking, and scratching his assailants. One trooper was knocked down with a stick, and a kanaka had a piece bitten out of his arm. After some time the handcuffs were slipped on to the wrists of the islander, and he was unable to do further damage.

As the boys returned to camp they were shouting out to warn Mr. White when Detective Johnston and Constables M'Carty and Toomey, hearing the noise, hastened to the spot and helped to take the prisoner into camp. There he was securely chained and preparations at once made for getting him into town.

The news of the capture soon spread, and people from all parts of the district gathered at the camp to have a look at the man who for so long had disturbed their minds and despoiled their larders. The occasion seemed one for general rejoicing, and the settlers expressed themselves as now "sure of a good Christmas after all." A spring cart was obtained and the prisoner brought into town.

The police in their search for the islander have had a task of a most discouraging nature. They had to find him in one of the roughest pieces of country in Southern Queensland, and strict orders were given to take him alive. It is said that great credit is due to the troopers and kanakas for the work they have done, and also to Sergeant O'Loan, Detective Johnston, and Constables Toomey and Daly. Mr. White has not spared himself in the search, and his plans were not only well laid but successful.

The islander was visited in the lockup last night by Dr. Tilston and was found to have sustained a few bruises, which were attended to. The prisoner gives the name of Johnny and speaks English very well. He says he has been in Queensland for thirteen years and is a native of Api.

He will not discuss his career in the colony, he being either cute enough to keep quiet or too dazed to enter into particulars. He has a very sore foot, which was injured, he says, by a stone three months ago.

Johnny is about 6ft. 7in, in height, and is fairly well built but though no doubt strong seems by no means so muscular a man as has been represented.

He was last night when wakened to see the doctor a miserable-looking object, but he was suffering from his injuries and depressed at being captured.

The troopers say he was very strong, and fought pluckily. It is understood that the prisoner will be brought before the Police Court this morning, charged with larceny and housebreaking, he having been caught red-handed in the latter a few days ago by a settler named Richards.

The troopers and the kanaka injured while making the capture are not seriously hurt.

13/12/1889

Larceny; -Johnny Lifu, alias the "Bunya Terror," was remanded for a week on a charge of larceny.

13/12/1889

There was an unusually large attendance at the City Police Court yesterday morning, and even before the business commenced it could easily be noticed that there was something unusual on hand.

In and about the court were Inspector Lewis, Sub inspectors White and Durham, Sergeants Primrose and O'Loan, Mounted Detective Johnson, Constables M'Carty, Toomey, and Daly, nearly all of whom are well known as having taken an active part in the search for "The Bunya Terror," while two black trackers and three troopers were waiting together downstairs.

As soon as the minor cases had been disposed of Sub-inspector Durham turned to Detective Johnson and said, "Bring up that blackfellow now." Mr. Pinnock heard the order and said, "Is that the Bunya black?" and of course he was answered in the affirmative.

A number of police went down to the cells to bring the daring darky before the court, in case he should give any trouble, but as it turned out a little boy might have led him in.

"Johnny Lifu," as he calls himself, did not give one the idea that he was a very great terror; he seemed thoroughly subdued.

The long hunt in which he has played so important a part, and the wounds and sores, which he carries, seem to have thoroughly exhausted him. He limped into the dock with a large bandage round his head and temporary splints on his left arm and hand while his left foot was rudely bound up in an old sack. His garments consisted of an old shirt, which was very dirty and foul smelling, a pair of very ragged trousers, and an old felt hat.

At Mr. Pinnock's request "Johnny" was removed from the dock and was accommodated with a chair near the bench as Inspector Lewis said he was not well.

In reply to Mr. PINNOCK, "Johnny" said he understood English a little. As was afterwards seen he understood all that was said, and gave very little trouble indeed.

The only justices on the bench were Messrs. P. Pinnock, P.M., L. Phillips, and A. Meston.

The charge at present standing against "Johnny" is larceny of a small looking glass and a shirt belonging a selector named Harry Richards.

Mounted Detective Adam Johnson deposed that between 8 and 9 o'clock on Wednesday morning he saw the "Terror" in a scrub at Branch Creek near the Pine River, handcuffed, and in charge of the troopers and trackers. He was taken to the main police camp at Ross's humpy.

Harry Richards directly he saw "Johnny" exclaimed, "That's him, that's the bugger, I saw in my humpy.

"Johnny nodded his head at Mr. Richards, and said with a grin, "Ugh! I do this (ducking his head), and you run plenty singing out, 'Police! Police!'"

Johnny was then conveyed to the city lockup. Witness produced a shirt and a looking glass, which had been identified by H. Richards.

Mr. PINNOCK said that he thought they should take as little evidence as possible that morning, and the case accordingly was adjourned for a week.

It is probable that further charges will be preferred against the "Terror."

14/12/1889

It is said to have cost the country about £300 to capture the Bunya black.

16/12/1889

One amusing circumstance in connection with the capture of the Bunya blackfellow which has not yet been published is that when he was caught he was attired in Constable McCarthy's trousers, and was wearing a hat belonging to another constable.

It appears that the outlaw actually robbed the police camp some seven or eight weeks ago, cut a new coat of Sub-inspector White's into shreds, and made off with the articles of clothing he was wearing when caught.

The police, with a very natural sense of the ridiculous, are somewhat reticent concerning this episode.

20/12/1889

Johnny Lifu, otherwise known as the Bunya Terror, was brought up in the City Police Court yesterday before "Mr. Pinnock, P.M., and other magistrates charged on remand with larcenies and house-breaking.

The accused seemed in much better health than when first arrested, and the wounds, which he had received in the scuffle incident to his capture, appear to be almost healed.

He has still, however, one of his arms in a sling.

Instead of his former tattered garments he is now attired in a new suit of prison clothes. He was accommodated with a chair near the witness stand.

The court was crowded with persons curious to see the notorious blackfellow.

Mounted-constable T. J. Sullivan, of Esk, at present stationed in Brisbane was the first witness examined.

He stated that he had been for some time past one of a party of police, black trackers, and kanakas who had been in search of the accused. Witness first caught sight of the accused about 5 p.m. on the 14th November. Prisoner was in the scrub and was about 20 yards away from witness at that time.

This occurred between Samsonvale and the Upper Cedar Creek.

On the morning of the 11th instant witness was in company with two other constables and a black tracker searching the scrub at the head of Branch Creek. Suddenly he heard shouts near, and on going in the direction of the sound found the accused in custody of a black tracker and a kanaka.

The prisoner was then handcuffed.

Witness asked him what was his name, and he replied "Johnny." Witness searched him and found in his possession two pocketknives, one sheath knife, a burning glass, a white shirt, a lead pencil, a looking glass, and a purse containing 15s. in silver. Witness asked prisoner where he got the money from, and he replied, "I worked for it in Brisbane."

Mr. PINNOCK: Had he any hesitation in his replies? Did he seem to thoroughly understand your questions? Witness: There was a hesitation in answering the questions, but he seemed to thoroughly understand them.

Mr. PINNOCK asked the accused whether he had any questions to ask the witness. The prisoner in reply said, indicating the articles produced, "That is my own money; that is the purse and the money, but not the knife."

Harry Richards, a selector, living at Branch Creek, on the Pine River, stated that he had resided there for the past five years.

On the 24th November he left his hut for a few days. Before doing so he secured the windows by nailing pieces of board across them inside. There were in the hut 3cwt. of potatoes, a pair of blankets, a white shirt, tea, sugar, flour, and some other small articles. He put all these in a corner and nailed slabs outside them.

He locked the door with a padlock on the outside. Witness returned to the hut at about 10 o'clock on the morning of 1st December. When he came near he observed that the door had been smashed in and that the accused was inside.

He was sitting on the floor making up in a swag some articles.

Witness said, "Hie," upon which the accused rushed at him "like a tiger." (Laughter.) Prisoner stooped down as if to take up something to aim at witness. Witness thereupon ran away. (Laughter.) The prisoner followed him for a short distance. While witness ran he "cooeyed." After running some time witness stopped, and looking back saw prisoner returning to the hut.

Witness watched him and saw him presently come out with a swag full of things and disappear in the scrub. Witness went to the police camp, which was about a mile away, and gave information of the occurrence.

The articles stolen were as follows: 1/2cwt. of potatoes, 12lb. of flour, 3lb. or 4lb. of sugar, some tea, a pair of blankets, a singlet, and a white shirt-total value about £1.

Entrance was obtained by cutting the wire hinges of the door with some sharp instrument, and then forcing the door in.

On the 11th instant witness saw the accused in custody, and at once identified him. A singlet, which the accused was then wearing, was witness's property. Some of the other articles, which had been found on the accused, were also identified by witness as part of the property stolen from him.

Police sergeant Hugh Malone deposed to passing the hut of the previous witness on the evening of the 3th November. It was then properly secured. Witness looked through the window and saw the locker, which Richards had made undisturbed. On Richards giving information of the robbery witness visited the house.

Detective Johnson stated that on the 16th instant, from information given to him by the accused, he visited a place at the head of Branch Creek, two or three miles from the police camp, and found there close to a half burned gum log and under some vines the blankets which had been taken from Richards's hut. They were rolled up in an old sugar bag.

At this stage the accused was again remanded for eight days.

28/12/1889

Johnny Lifu, known as the Bunya black, was brought up on remand charged with larceny and house breaking, and was further remanded.

11/01/1890

Johnny Lifu who is now well known as the Bunya Black has again brought before the City Police Court bench yesterday morning.

He appeared in coat and trousers labelled "Brisbane Gaol," and his foot is still bandaged. He was very quiet, and hung his head in a very despondent manner the whole time.

Sub inspector Durham prosecuted and stated that the first case, in which the defendant was charged with having stolen articles of clothing flour, and potatoes belonging to a settler named Richards, had previously been completed.

Defendant was then charged with having burglariously entered the house of Mrs. Glover at "The Basin" Samson Vale and having stolen a number of articles on the night of the 18th October.

A mounted constable deposed that he first saw the defendant about half past 10 on the morning of the 14th November last in a scrub between Branch Creek and Samson Vale.

Constable Forest and two trackers were with witness. Defendant was sitting on a log with a dress and a billycan beside him. He was dressed in a dark blue coat and trousers

and a sailors cap. They got within thirty yards of where he was sitting, but he jumped up and ran away. They took possession of the property.

Constable Forest said that he first saw the black on the 9th October last in a scrub. Witness was lying behind a log watching his tent when he saw the defendant coming to the spot from the opposite direction. When he got within twenty yards of witness he jumped behind a tree and looked round. He then ran off very quickly into the thickest part of the scrub and escaped. Witness saw him again on the 14th November, when he got away again. The third time he saw the "Terror" he was in the city watch house.

By this time the cap and dress, which had been produced were smelling so abominably that they had to be removed.

Mrs. Edith Glover at "The Basin" at Samson Vale stated that she was sewing up till half past 9 on the night of the 11th October. Then she went to the dairy, which was attached to the house-covered by the same roof. She remained there till half-past 10. There were flour meat and butter in the dairy, as well as sugar. She had a quantity of clothing hanging, up in her bedroom the window in which was open. She bolted the door of the dairy and locked the door of the skillion.

Early in the morning she was disturbed by some noise but she paid no attention to it.

Next morning she found that all her flour (70lb) and all the butter (20lb) were gone. About 70lb of sugar had also been taken from the skillion. She missed a dress from her bedroom and a piece of blanket. Both the dairy and skillion doors were wide open. She identified bare feet tracks about the house by the side of patches of flour. She identified parts of a dress as her property.

She valued the property which was stolen it about £5.

"Johnny" here stated, "I saw no sugar in the room. The dress was lying outside under a tree."

John Glover, son of the last witness said that early on the morning of the 18th October last he heard his window being opened. He got up and looked about, but saw no one. He missed a box of caps from his table. His mother made a complaint to him next morning.

This closed the second case and Sub-inspector Graham said that he did not proceed in the third case, in much information had been laid.

"Johnny" was then charged in the first case. He made no reply, and was committed for trial to the next sittings of the Southern District Court to be held at Brisbane on the 12th February.

He was also committed for trial on the second charge.

13/02/1890

At the Southern District Court yesterday, before Judge Paul, Johnny Lifu, the Bunya black, was convicted of larceny, and sentenced to three years' penal servitude.

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