

TRANSACTIONS AND PROCEEDINGS

AND

REPORT

OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY of SOUTH AUSTRALIA.

V O L . V .

(FOR 1881-82.)



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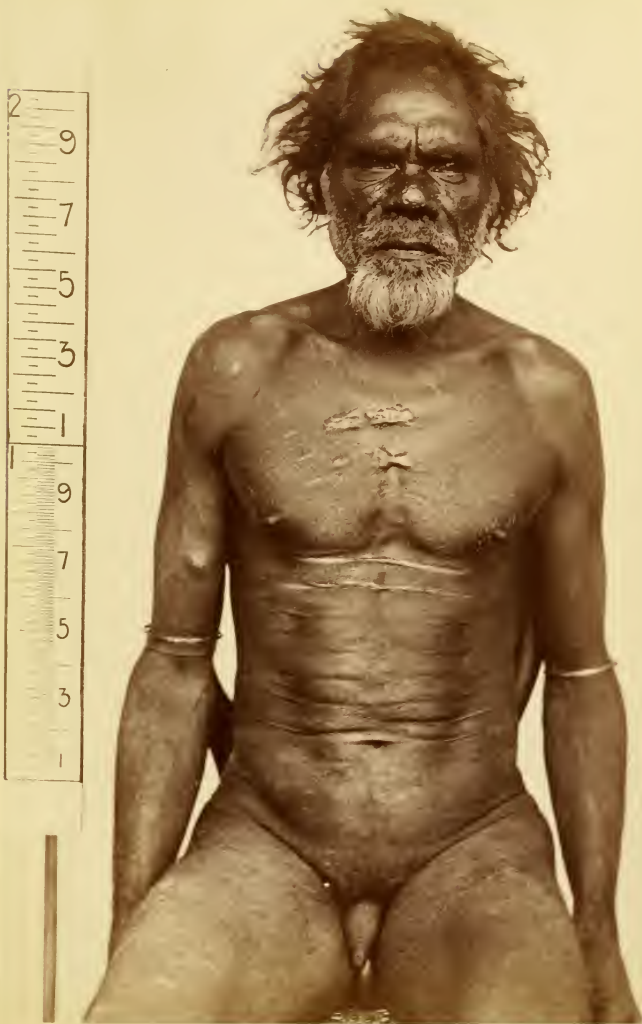
DARBARBOON, 19 YEARS. WOOLWONGAH TRIBE, COLLETT'S CREEK.



LIALLOON, 40 YEARS. WOOLNAH TRIBE, ADELAIDE RIVER.



LIALLOON, 40 YEARS. WOOLNAH TRIBE, ADELAIDE RIVER.



MANNINGELL, 58 YEARS. BARRAH TRIBE, ALLIGATOR RIVER.



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MARANDAH, 35 YEARS. LARRAKEAH TRIBE, PORT DARWIN.



KAROOK, 36 YEARS. WAGGITE TRIBE, PORT PATTERSON.



WARREIMBEE, 26 YEARS. BARRAH TRIBE, ALLIGATOR RIVER.



WARREIMBEE, 26 YEARS. BARRAH TRIBE, ALLIGATOR RIVER.



MINMIRRAHMA, 27 YEARS. WOOLNAH TRIBE, ADELAIDE RIVER.



MINMIRRAHMA, 27 YEARS. WOOLNAH TRIBE, ADELAIDE RIVER.



ANNAOKA, 34 YEARS. BARRAH TRIBE, ALLIGATOR RIVER.



ANNAOKA, 34 YEARS. BARRAH TRIBE, ALLIGATOR RIVER.

NOTES ON THE ABORIGINES OF NORTH AUSTRALIA.

By PAUL FOELSCHÉ, Inspector of Police, Northern Territory ;
Corr. Memb.

[Read August 2, 1881.]

A good deal has from time to time been written about the aborigines of Australia, and a vast amount of information on this subject has been gathered from all the settled parts of Australia ; but all that is known of the aborigines inhabiting the northern portion of this continent has been furnished by a few persons who have paid only short visits to the north coast of Australia, and consequently had not sufficient time to get well acquainted with the natives, their habits and customs. I, therefore, venture to supply a few notes on the above subject, such as have come under my observation during eleven years' residence in the Northern Territory. They may be of no great value, but when compared with the valuable paper on the "Aborigines of South Australia," by Mr. J. D. Woods, in the Society's Transactions for 1879, may furnish some information either in support of or against the supposition that the aborigines all round the Australian coastline have sprung from one source, as well as some new facts hitherto not brought under the notice of the Society.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS.

The few accompanying portraits of men and women of different tribes by way of illustration will show that the physical characteristics of the natives inhabiting the north coast of Australia vary considerably from those in the south, especially as far as the features are concerned. The majority of the men are well built, but the skin is smooth, and the strong covering of hair all over the body so often met with in the south is almost entirely absent on the north coast, at least among those tribes with which I have come in contact ; and the growth of hair on the face is very scanty, but on the head it is invariably thick and curly, and I have met with instances where it strongly resembles that of the Papuans, but these are very rare. The women, as a rule, are not so stout as in the south, and with a few exceptions the hair is not so curly as that of the men. The hair of both sexes is, in my opinion, not near so black as in the south ; but all this may be the

results of climatic influences. The mouth, as a rule, is not so wide, and the noses not so flat, although the custom with both sexes of wearing sticks through the nose has a tendency to flatten it considerably. They have good strong teeth, but, as far as I remember, not so beautiful as those of the south. Physically speaking, the strongest tribes I have met with are those on the Alligator Rivers in Van Diemen's Gulf—a great many of the men are over six feet high, and well proportioned. I have only been able to get a few samples of photos. of these tribes, as they very seldom come near the settlements.

LANGUAGE.

Each separate tribe speaks a different language or dialect, but whether they are only a modification of one form of speech or not I am not in a position to state. It is surprising in what remarkable short time all natives learn to speak English. All natives round the coast, from the Coburg Peninsula to the mouth of the Roper River, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, speak the Malay language, acquired by long intercourse with trepang fishers from Macassar, who visit the coast in their prahus during the rainy season, and employ the natives as divers, &c.

LAWS.

Murder is punished with death, except when a native is killed by one of his own tribe, in such case the offender is punished by spearing him severely; but care is taken that he is not mortally wounded. If a native kills one of another tribe, a party of young men is sent out by the tribe of the deceased to kill the murderer if he can be found, if not, one of his near relations has to suffer in his place, and after a lapse of some time that tribe visits the former, and a fight with small reed spears takes place, without any serious consequences, after which the tribes are on friendly terms again.

Disputes between two or more of the same tribe are settled among themselves by fighting it out, if they cannot otherwise agree.

Theft is punished by the offenders, of both sexes, having to submit to being speared, after which—in the majority of cases—they are allowed to retain the stolen property. This is looked upon as a reproach, and the thief generally disposes of the property by giving it to a neighbouring tribe.

Adultery is not much thought of; the woman offender only receives a beating with a small stick, and the male offender has to submit to a small reed spear being thrust through his arm by the suffering husband.

Intermarriage between near relations is looked upon as a grave offence, and is the cause of constant quarrels between the offenders and the other members of the tribe; the former

are incessantly subject to being speared, which invariably ends in the death of one or both of the offenders. But should they be lucky enough to live till they have an offspring, then all quarrelling ceases, and the marriage is looked upon as legal.

Elopements and stealing of "lubras" are of frequent occurrence, and causes little or no row and fighting. It occurs only among young people, and the old men—who very often have several young lubras—are generally the sufferers. If a young lubra fancies a man, and asks him to go away with her in the bush, there is no quarrelling; but if a man takes or persuades a lubra to run away with him it causes a row, and often ends in fighting. After the parties have cohabited together for a night or two, and like each other, they live together, and after a while return to camp as man and wife. If, on the other hand, they are not pleased with each other, they separate at once, return to camp, and no more is said about it.

In any kind of offence after the law—such as it is—is satisfied, not a vestige of enmity seems to remain, and the matter in dispute is never referred to again. I have never known a second quarrel to arise out of a dispute once disposed of.

MARRIAGE.

There is no ceremony connected with marriage; in the majority of cases it is arranged when the parties are mere infants, and in many instances female children when born are promised to men of all ages; this accounts for so many middle-aged and old men having mere children for wives. As soon as the girl arrives at the age of puberty, and has undergone certain ceremonies, she is handed over to her affianced husband, whether young or old, who takes her to his camp, and she then travels about with him wherever he goes. If the husband is old, he very often has his young lubra stolen from him by a young man who has not been lucky enough to have one given to him, and in some instances young lubras themselves propose to young men to run away with them. If a young man has a sister not promised to any one, he gives her to another man who has a sister similarly situated, whom he takes in exchange. Sometimes, if a husband gets tired of his wife, or she does not suit him, he gives her away to another man, generally to one of another tribe; but such cases are by no means frequent occurrences. I have never heard of a husband selling his wife, perhaps for the simple reason that they have no real or personal property beyond a few spears to give in exchange.

Men often send their wives to each other for one or two nights, or to any favoured individual; this is looked upon as a particular act of friendship.

Polygamy is universal, and I know natives who have as many as four wives. When a husband dies his wife or wives and children become the property of his brother or next of kin, irrespective of their having a wife or wives of their own, provided the widows are not too old, in that case they remain widows.

There is no restriction as to marriages, except among blood relations; but if parents are of different tribes, the children belong to the father's tribe.

CHILDREN.

The average of births of children is not more than two to each married woman. It is the custom of some tribes, if the wives have more than three or four children, to kill the newborn ones. The reason assigned for this is that they encumber the parents in travelling about for food. Generally speaking natives are very fond of their children. There are very few half-castes, and it is generally believed that many of them are killed, although the natives do not admit this.

CANNIBALISM

Is practised by all natives on the north coast with whom I have come in contact, with the exception of a very small tribe inhabiting the immediate neighbourhood of Port Essington. This tribe is the most civilised on the northern coast, having for years been under the influence of the military who were stationed at the old settlement at Port Essington, which was abandoned in December, 1849. The eating of grown-up people—that is, of natives—is, as far as I can ascertain, not practised. Only children of tender age—up to about two years old—are considered fit subjects for food, and if they fall ill are often strangled by the old men, cooked, and eaten, and all parts except the head, which is skinned and buried, are considered a delicacy. Parents eat their own children, and all, young and old, partake of it. The only instance I have heard where grown-up people have been eaten, was that of two Europeans who were out exploring in the neighbourhood of the Tor Rock, about forty miles inland from Mount Norris Bay; this was in 1874. These unfortunate travellers were, according to the statements of the friendly natives, killed by the "Tor Rock" tribe, cooked and eaten; and from my own knowledge of the natives in that neighbourhood I have no reason to doubt this statement to be correct.

CORROBORIES.

They are of a similar character as in the south, and are performed on various occasions, such as when different tribes visit each other, when members of the tribe die, when returning

from a friendly visit to another tribe, when they feel inclined to be jolly, when preparing for fighting with another tribe, when portion of a tribe are about to start on some expedition and when they return, and on many other occasions either of friendly or hostile nature. Sometimes these corrobories last all night, and on mostly all occasions the men paint themselves. At corrobories in honour of the dead, men and women paint themselves red, white, and yellow; on all other occasions any colour they fancy, which sometimes takes hours to put on, and covers the whole body, when they very much resemble in appearance the clowns in circuses. Corrobories of a war-like nature are generally held before sundown; for the dead, before and after sundown; and on all other occasions after sundown, whether moonlight or dark.

FUNERALS.

Dead children up to about the age of two years if in good condition are with few exceptions not buried, but eaten; above that age and up to about ten years they are buried about eighteen inches deep in the ground, and are never disturbed. After the body is buried all natives in camp blacken themselves with charcoal, and squat down around a heap of yams prepared for the occasion, which are eaten by all present; after which, if deceased is considered to have been a good boy or girl, they corrobore till sundown. On the next day a short pole about three feet long and six inches thick is put in the ground close to the camp, and painted red, white, and yellow. The natives then paint themselves of the same colours, and in the evening corrobore again for a short time; and next day the camp is deserted—unless it is an old favourite camping place—and locate themselves some short distance away. The painted pole is left in the ground. When young grown-up people die they are rolled up in bark perforated with pointed sticks or leaves to allow the liquid to run through. A corrobore is held, and the body is taken to some chosen tree and put up in the branches, on which bark is laid for the body to rest upon. On this the body is placed, and covered over with bark. They then return to camp and corrobore again; after which a pole, similar to the one put up for children, is planted in the ground and painted as before mentioned, and the natives paint themselves the same colours—red, white, and yellow—and corrobore for three successive nights; after which the camp is deserted, and a new one formed some distance away. When old people die the body is left on the ground till decomposition has well set in, when the body is buried in a shallow grave; up to this time corrobories are held night and morning. After the body is buried corrobories

are kept up for several nights, all night through, and on these occasions a great deal of red, white, and yellow paint is used by both sexes. After two moons the bones are looked at, and if the flesh is off them they are collected in a basket by old men and put in a tree close to the camp. If the flesh is not off the bones when the grave is opened it is filled up again, and the remains are left undisturbed. The day after the bones are gathered together and put in a tree they are taken into camp, and a corroboree follows. The following night the corroboree is kept up till next morning, and the bones are buried in a small hole about two feet deep. The Port Essington natives have a custom after all the bones have been collected together to carry them about with them in a basket for a long time, sometimes for over twelve months; but this is chiefly done by the women. Sometimes old people, relations of the deceased, at certain times give way to fits of sorrow and grief, which is demonstrated by wailing and lamentation; at the same time they cut themselves with any kind of sharp instrument over the head, arms, and body until large clots of blood cover the wounds.

rites and customs.

The youths, before being admitted into manhood, have to undergo certain rites and customs, in many respects similar to those practised in the southern colonies. With the exception of the few coast tribes from Port Darwin eastwards to the Liverpool River circumcision is practised by all the tribes with whom Europeans have come in contact; it is performed at about the age of from sixteen to eighteen years, after which they are entitled to all the rights and privileges of the tribe.

The youths of those tribes that do not circumcise have to pass through several stages between the ages of twelve and twenty-four years before they are admitted into manhood. A few tribes have a custom of knocking out one of the upper front teeth. This is done at about the age of fourteen years but does not seem to be compulsory, and the custom appears to be dying out.

In some tribes the young females are subject to some revolting customs before they are allowed to be married or rather allowed to cohabit with their affianced husbands; but these customs are of such a disgusting nature that they are not fit to be mentioned here. Between the ages of twelve and twenty years, both males and females mutilate their bodies by making cuts in the flesh on the upper parts of the arms, just below the shoulder joints, across the chest, body, rump, and thighs, and raise large scars or wheals by way of ornamentation. This is done with a sharp kind of white flint stone, the same as is used for spear heads; they then chew leaves of a native plum-tree,

and put it in the wound. This is left till it begins to fall off, when the flesh is found to have grown considerably above the surface of the original wound, sometimes to the extent of half an inch; it is then allowed to heal. There is no fixed rule as to how many cuts are to be made on the different parts of the body, but is left to the option and fancy of each individual person.

The septum of the nose is also pierced, but this is done at a very early age; it is done for the purpose of wearing a bone or stick through it as an ornament, but is only worn till they become middle-aged, and never by old people. The only reason assigned for this custom is—giving their own words—“to make young girls and boys look nice.”

A singular custom prevails amongst the Larrakeah, Woolnah, Woolwongah, and Irambal tribes, inhabiting the neighbourhood of Port Darwin, Port Patterson, and Daly River. It is to remove the first two joints of the index finger of the right hand of some of the young females when of the age of about two years. There is nothing compulsory about this custom or rite, but is decided by the parents whether it is to be done or not. It is generally believed that females on whom this operation is performed, when grown up, are able to find plenty of yams and other food for their husbands and families.

The operation is performed by making a ligature of large spider webs found in the jungles, which is tightened daily till the joint drops off, when it is buried; the wound is then covered over with chewed leaves of the native plum tree, and in about one month the flesh is grown over the bone and the wound healed. The leaves of this native plum tree, when chewed and placed on a wound, seems to have the property of promoting granulation, for after the finger has fallen off the whole surface of the joint is exposed, and in a month's time it is nicely covered over and healed.

DISEASES AND CURES.

Smallpox.—The disease most dreaded by the natives is smallpox—for which each tribe has, of course, a different name. It makes great havoc among the tribes that get infected. The last time this disease made its appearance on this coast is, as far as I can judge and ascertain, about twenty years ago. According to the tradition of a native living at Port Darwin named “Mangminone,” alias Mr. Knight, about 25 years of age, he had the smallpox when a boy of about five years (this man is deeply pitted all over the face), and sometime before the white people arrived at Escape Cliffs—the Hon. B. T. Finnis's expedition in 1864. The disease broke out in the dry season, when the natives burned the grass. Old and young

were stricken down with it, and a great many died, so much so that they could not bury them all, but left the corpses lying about. Among those that recovered were several who became totally blind, and there are now four of these living in this immediate neighbourhood. The disease lasted only during the dry season, from about May to November, and disappeared when the wet season set in. The Port Darwin natives call the disease "Goobimwah," and state it came from the Alligator River tribes, and travelled westward, but how far it went I cannot ascertain; no doubt it spread a long distance inland, as pock-marked natives are found among all the inland tribes.

The tradition of the Port Essington natives of the appearance of smallpox in their tribe is very similar to that of the Port Darwin natives. Some of the Port Essington tribe (called "Yiárick," also "Unállah," now numbering only about thirty all told) who had the disease are still alive, and from information gathered from them it leaves no doubt but that the malady raged there the same time and year it was at Port Darwin. They state it was a long time ago, and a long time after the soldiers had left (the old settlement was abandoned in December, 1849), and came one year shortly after the Malay prahus had started back for Macassar (about the end of May), and when the grass was burned it came from the tribes to the eastward of them, and went on to the Alligator and other tribes to the west of them. Plenty of old and young (and even dogs) died, but by the time the rain came on (about October or November) the disease had disappeared.

One of this tribe named Jack Davis (a name given him by the soldiers), who is very intelligent and speaks English and Malay fluently, informed me that very old people had told him that when they were children smallpox (called by them "Meeha-meeha") killed plenty blackfellows, and adds that by-and-bye, when he will be an old man (he is now about 50), "meeha-meeha" come on again.

Malay prahus, about 30 in number, visit the coast eastward from Port Essington to Blue Mud Bay in the Gulf of Carpentaria every year in search of "beche-de-mer," and have done so in all probability for centuries past. They arrive from Macassar the beginning of January, and leave again the end of May. During the time they are here they employ all the coast tribes trepaning for them, and they all live together; and I think there can be no doubt as to smallpox having been brought to these shores by them, and on the last occasion by a prahu that visited the Gulf, for they leave so soon as the South-East monsoon has fairly set in, and shortly after the prahu had left the disease appeared, coming up the coast from the Gulf with the S.E. winds, as stated by the natives, and

travelled through all the tribes to the westward. Is it not likely that this terrible disease, "the smallpox," was introduced here by these trepang-fishers some hundred of years ago, and then spread gradually all over the Continent?

The remedy the natives apply to cure smallpox is a thick milky-looking juice obtained from a leafless vine* found along the shores of mangrove flats. It twines in among other bushes, and is called by Port Darwin natives "Gaoloowurrah." This juice is put on the sores, and left till it forms a scab, which is washed off so soon as it gets loose, when the sore is found to be healed, the skin is white, and takes about a year to attain its natural colour. This remedy is said to be a sure cure, although some who used it lost their eyesight; but strange to say some patients object to having it applied, but why they cannot explain.

Fever.—Malarious fever is very prevalent among the natives, but they do not seem to have any remedy for this complaint, and it terminates fatally in many cases.

Boils are also frequently met with, and affect young and old alike. So soon as they make their appearance they are poulticed with leaves and hot water till they break.

Coughs and Colds are very common complaints among the natives, which they cure by eating a kind of grub found in mangrove trees, and drink the liquid with which the grub is surrounded when in the wood. This grub resembles very much the common earthworm.

Ringworm, or a very similar disease, is a plague from which the natives in the neighbourhood of Port Darwin suffer greatly. This disease spreads over large portions of the body, and I have seen the whole of the abdomen covered with it as well as the greater portion of the back. The natives say the Woolnahs bring this disease from the Adelaide River. It certainly seems to be very local, for it is not known at Port Essington, nor west of Port Darwin. The Alligator and Adelaide Rivers and Port Darwin tribes seem to be the only ones troubled with this complaint. The only remedy applied is to put the affected parts close to a brisk fire till the skin gets scorched, which they say kills the disease.

Syphilis is occasionally met with, but it is by no means common among the natives. I have seen only a few cases during the eleven years I have been here.

Venereal disease is rather prevalent, and they have some means of curing it.

Broken limbs are set with a good deal of skill and placed

* On my recent visit to the Northern Territory, the plant, which was shown to me by a native in company with the author, proved to be *Sarcostemma australe*, R. Br.—R. Tate.

in a kind of splint made of strips of bamboo and fastened together with string made of the bark of Banyan trees, and large enough to go round the injured limb. It is then tightly secured with string, and left till the break or fracture is healed. Should inflammation set in the part is bathed with hot or cold water.

Neuralgia is cured by making a poultice of the fruit of the red *Eugenia*, if obtainable, by roasting them in the fire, mashing them up and putting it while hot on a piece of soft bark (paper bark), which is placed over the affected part till all the moisture is absorbed and the poultice quite dry, when it is replaced by a fresh one. According to the statement of the natives, the second application invariably cures the complaint.

Gatherings in the ears, from which the natives suffer a great deal during the wet season from lying on the wet ground, is also treated with the above-mentioned fruit by squeezing the juice after the fruit is roasted into the ear.

Lunacy in a mild form is occasionally met with, and the natives have great faith in the application of iron bark and native plum-tree leaves heated over a fire, with which the whole head and face is covered.

Wounds are not much thought of, and are treated in various ways. Spear-wounds are generally stopped up with pounded bark of the native plum-tree, to keep out the air; fresh boiled urine is freely applied, which generally heals the wound, unless internal injury has been received.

Cut wounds and old sores, especially of a constitutional nature, are treated with a resinous substance of a blood-red appearance, called by the Port Darwin natives "gnewálah," and is obtained from a Eucalyptus tree. When taken from the tree it is generally very hard, but when put in water and squeezed it gets soft like putty. It is well washed, and all the dirt removed. It is then spread thickly on a piece of paper-bark like a plaster and applied to the wound or sore; and it is left on till it gets dry, which it does in a few days, when it is easily taken off; and if the wound is not closed, fresh plaster is applied until the sore is healed up. Fresh wounds are also treated with the scraped bark of a bush called by the Port Darwin natives "malimgarrácah." It is soaked in urine, and applied to the wound. The juice obtained from the bark of the milk tree, and called "gaolooanúlkah," is said to possess extraordinary healing properties. It is applied to the wound with the finger, and is very sticky. The natives state this juice destroys the eyesight if a drop should get into the eye, and they always shut their eyes when cutting the bark to get the juice.

I have a native in my employ who had a good-sized sore on

his foot which, according to his own statement, came of its own accord. Our medical officer here attended to it for upwards of six months; occasionally the wound got smaller, but always opened out again, and would not heal up. At last the native got tired of this treatment and applied the resinous substance mentioned above. At this time the wound was about one-and-a-half inches long and three-quarters of an inch wide, but not deep; in about a fortnight's time he removed the plaster, when the wound was properly healed.

Snakebite is treated by putting ligatures some distance above and below the wound, and then open the largest artery in the vicinity of the bite with a sharp stone, shell, or other sharp instrument; several incisions are made until copious bleeding is the result, the ligatures are not removed for two or three days, when the patient is all right. I have never heard of a native dying from a snakebite.

On inquiry why the cuts are not made immediately over the bite, it was explained that the poison entered numerous small blood vessels which all run into larger ones through which it is disseminated through the whole body; thus it shows the natives have some knowledge of the anatomy of the human body. Bleeding is considered a cure for all sorts of pains in the head or limbs, and is resorted to very freely. This paragraph on diseases and their cures relates more particularly to the tribes in the neighbourhood of Port Darwin.

Doctors.—The tribes in the neighbourhood of Port Darwin have all recognised doctors, consisting of both men and women, but their knowledge of diseases is very limited, and the remedies they apply are very few, and what they cannot cure with them, they pretend to cure by charms. The remedies for diseases described in the preceding paragraphs are known to and practised by nearly all the elder members of the tribes, and acknowledged doctors pretend chiefly to cure internal diseases.

These doctors teach their pretended knowledge only to their own children, who again teach their children. This accounts for there being female doctors who are considered to possess all the qualities the men doctors do.

HUMAN FAT.

Nearly all natives use fat obtained from dead bodies of either their own or other tribes for anointing themselves with, which they believe makes them strong and able to fight well. The fat taken from all parts of the body is mixed with red ochre to prevent it melting away. It is then tied in paper-bark, and in this state is distributed among the men, and very often some is sent to other tribes. It is not used by women, nor have I ever heard of its being eaten.

WEAPONS AND CANOES.

The weapons are similar to those in the southern colonies, but shields and boomerangs are not used. The principal weapons are clubs and spears. The latter are of great variety. Some shaped out of solid pieces of wood are thrown by hand without the aid of woomerahs or throwing sticks. Poisoned spears are not used.

Canoes are made of bark, of similar size as in South Australia; but the ends, instead of being bent up, are cut slanting and neatly sewed together with fine strips of bamboo, giving them a sharp stem and stern. The gunwales are made of bamboo, thereby being nicely shaped. They are propelled through the water by small hand-paddles at a great speed. The Port Essington natives have acquired the knowledge of cutting canoes out of a solid tree from the Malays visiting that part of the coast every year trepang-fishing, from whom they also obtain the necessary tools for that purpose. Weapons and canoes form the only real property the natives possess, but do not accumulate them.

ROYAL FAMILY.

None of the natives on the north coast that I have met with have a recognised king or royal family, but the old men seem to be the rulers of the tribe, to whom all cheerfully submit. Any one individual distinguishing himself in war or in any other way is looked upon as a great man, and takes a prominent part in all disputes with other tribes.

SUBSISTENCE.

Australian natives in their wild state rarely provide for the morrow, and seem to have no idea to make provision for the future, and to this those inhabiting the northern portion of the continent are no exception. They start on a journey without a thought as to where the next meal is to come from, but as Nature has in this part of Australia provided a plentiful supply of reptiles, game, fish, &c., they procure sufficient as they travel along by the time they feel hungry.

Native yams grow plentifully in many places, and are much sought after as food, as also the roots of lilies growing in swamps and lagoons.

Their mode of procuring food is not attended with so much difficulty as people unacquainted with natives in their wild state imagine. Fish being plentiful in rivers, creeks, water-holes, and lagoons, it forms a principal part of the native food, especially along the coast. Large fish are speared, and at low tides small fish are left in holes on the reefs, and are easily caught; as also large crabs, which are plentiful. If they

cannot spear fish in waterholes or creeks, they strip the bark of certain trees, which is pounded with stones till the fibre gets soft. It is then put in the waterhole, which after a little while has the effect of stupefying the fish, and they float on the surface, when they are gathered up. Torches are employed by night, by which the fish are attracted and speared. Small nets made of the fibre of the bark of Banjar trees are also used for catching fish. Snakes, lizards, &c., are knocked over with sticks and stones. In the dry season the grass is set on fire, when all kinds of reptiles and other animals are easily secured.

Kangaroos generally have regular beaten tracks or paths leading to water, on which they are waylaid and speared.

Ducks and geese are killed in various ways. While feeding in swamps, the natives armed with short sticks crawl up to them among the rushes, and when near enough throw the sticks among the flock, which generally cripples some. The natives also climb up high trees near swamps, and with small sticks kill geese flying over to their feeding ground. But the more ingenious method of catching ducks and geese is to go into the water some distance from where the game is, cover their heads with lilies and leaves growing in the water, and then work their way with just their eyes and nose above water up to the game, which is seized by the legs and pulled under water. This method of catching game is also practised on the shores of Lake Alexandrina, in South Australia.

Another method of catching geese—which at certain times of the year are very plentiful—is to build a small bell-shaped hut among the rushes and swamps visited by geese. The hut is constructed of rushes, and a few holes just large enough to admit the body of a goose are made round the bottom of the hut. In these holes are placed young lilies and roots, on which the geese feed. A native then gets into the hut and closes it in at the top. The geese come feeding about the hut, and seeing the lilies and roots, put their head through the hole to get them, when the native inside the hut seizes them by the head, pulls them through the hole, and twists their neck off; others seeing their mates disappearing through the holes have a look in also, and are treated in the same way, and great numbers are caught sometimes by this simple process. Turtle, geese, and alligator eggs in all stages and condition are delicacies, and much sought after.

Yams of different kinds are, when in season, a considerable item of food for the natives. Some of these yams when eaten raw cause the mouth and throat to swell, accompanied by great pain. These yams have to be specially prepared to render them eatable. To do this a hole is scraped in the ground, which is paved with stones. A large fire is then made in the hole till

the stones are of a sufficient heat, when it is cleared out and the yams put in it. They are then covered over with leaves, and over all from four to six inches of earth. It is then left till next day, by which time the yams are cooked and all the noxious substance has disappeared.

Shellfish of all descriptions form an important part of subsistence to natives on the coast.

The natives' mode of preparing their food is very simple. Everything that requires cooking is prepared on hot coals; small animals are cooked whole; large ones, such as kangaroo, are torn in pieces and then cooked, and not the smallest particle is wasted.

Native fruits (not plentiful), roots of lilies and rushes, and tops of the cabbage palm, are eaten raw.

ORNAMENTS.

The ornaments worn by the natives consist of a stick through the septum of the nose, a sort of wig made of the hair of natives of other tribes, which is exchanged for that purpose. Kangaroo teeth are fastened on to locks of hair with a resinous substance used for fastening stone spear-heads on to bamboo shafts; the heads of small birds and ducks' bills are fastened on to the hair; bunches of white feathers fastened on to a short painted stick are stuck in the hair; and a narrow strip of bark painted white is tied across the forehead. Necklets made of grass stems cut in half-inch lengths, representing beads, are put on strings and worn round the neck; also long tassels with small tufts of feathers are fastened to the hair on each side of the head; the same kind of tassels are also fastened on to the elbows, and rings of grass are plaited round the arms above the elbow, round the wrists and fingers. Painted belts made of bark, and some of female hair, are worn round the waist, but all these ornaments, with the exception of a stick through the nose, kangaroo teeth, and ducks' bills in the hair, necklaces and armlets, are exclusively worn by the men, who also wear a large tassel about nine inches long and six inches wide to cover their nakedness. The Port Essington natives and those along the coast as far as the Roper River wear also ornaments made of proper beads obtained from the Malays visiting the coast.

SIGNALLING.

The natives have a system of conveying messages to each other at considerable distance, almost as far as they can see each other, by means of signs made with the arms. This system of telegraphing is greatly practised, even when at speaking distance, and consequently some are quite experts in

the art. It has been asserted that Masonic signs have been discovered among the natives in North Australia; but during my whole eleven years' residence here, during which time I have come in contact with a great many different tribes, I have noticed nothing approaching to Masonic signs, with which I am well acquainted. No doubt the above-mentioned system of telegraphing has been mistaken for these signs.

DRAWINGS

By natives are met with among all tribes, generally representing existing objects. The only imaginary object I have seen painted is the so-called "Devil-devil" (appellation borrowed from Europeans), an evil spirit in whose existence all natives believe, but for whom each tribe has a different name. Natives are constantly in dread of this evil spirit when travelling in the bush.

ORIGIN.

I once listened to a conversation between a Port Darwin and a Port Essington native. Being of different tribes, and speaking different languages, they commenced in broken English, which both spoke fairly. The subject of conversation was the origin of their race. Being at that time well-acquainted with the tradition of the Port Essington natives as to their origin, I felt anxious to obtain what information I could from the Port Darwin native on the same subject, and on questioning him he stated that he knew very little about it, but that "Lirrawah," of the Southport branch of the Larrakeah tribe, could give me the whole history, but that he was very reluctant to communicate to the other blackfellows. This native is a doctor, and held in great esteem by the whole tribe as a learned man, who, as they term it, "knows plenty all about." I embraced the first opportunity of "Lirrawah's" visit to Port Darwin to gain what information I could from him on the origin of his race, and on the promise that I would not tell other blackfellows, elicited from him the following disjointed statement:—A very good man, called "Mangarraah," lives in the sky among the stars, a place called "Teelahdlah." He made all living creatures upon earth, except blackfellows. He also made the trees, grass, water, and everything; and makes wind, rain, and thunder. He never dies, and likes all blackfellows.

Another good man called "Nangánburrah" lives in the bowels of the earth, a place called "Ahbybúggah." He a long time ago made one blackfellow, called him "Dawed," and taught him how to make blackfellows. "Dawed" made plenty of boys and girls, who grew up and multiplied. When "Dawed" was an old man the blackfellows growled plenty,

and would not do what he told them; he then made them very ill, and plenty died, but some got better. "Dawed" then caught some geese, and told blackfellows to eat them, but some old women refused, saying the geese were no good; "Dawed" then made the first spears, and speared the old women in the legs, when a strange blackfellow called "Shares" appeared, helped the old women, and took them to his own country called "Tooparánlah;" "Dawed" followed him, and demanded the women back again, which was refused. "Shares" and these women had plenty of children, which now form the "Woolwángah" tribe, inhabiting the country between Southport and Pine Creek. "Shares" was a bad man, and when he died turned into a large stone in the Pine Creek country. This stone the natives state is situated on a large creek, and is much feared by them. They say any one touching it will soon die.

"Dawed," when he found he could not get the women back again from "Shares," went to "Língowah," a place on the Adelaide River, where he saw a beautiful young girl called "Abmáhdam." He liked her, but she refused to go with him; he then sent something from his own person which had the appearance of a snake. This fetched the girl to him, and he had intercourse with her.

"Dawed" then went back to his own country, and the girl remained on the Adelaide River, where, in course of time, she had plenty of babies, who grew up and now form the "Woolnah" tribe on the Adelaide River.

"Abmáhdam" afterwards died, and turned into a tree at a place on the Adelaide River called "Layláyloo." "Dawed," after making all about blackfellow, died and also turned into a tree on the Adelaide River at a place called "Ahlee áhlee." These trees, the natives assert, are still growing on the Adelaide River, and are much revered, for "Dawed" and "Abmáhdam" have been good people. Near the place where "Dawed" turned into a tree, when he died, there is a large waterhole highly revered by the natives, who believe that sick persons bathing in this water get cured. "Dawed" also taught all the blackfellows how to make the different kinds of weapons and all the other things which blackfellows are now making.

"Nangánburrah," who lives in the ground, is designated "all same Government." He can read and write, and when blackfellows growl write it down in a book. When blackfellows die they go down into the ground to "Nangánburrah," and if they have been good, which is ascertained by referring to the book, "Nangánburrah" gives them a letter to give to "Mangarárrah," with whom they then live among the stars. If they have been bad and growled they are sent to a place deep down in the ground called "Ohmar," where there is

plenty of fire; and long way under this place is a large water called "Búrcoot," where one blackfellow named "Mádjuít-Mádjuít" sits down. He regulates the tides according to the changes of the moon. He, like "Mangarárrah" and "Nangánburrah," never dies.

The tradition of the natives in the neighbourhood as to their origin is as follows:—A long time ago a big woman called "Warahmoorúngee," in a state of pregnancy, came from the North, there being no water on earth at that time. She arrived at Port Essington, and finding it to be a good country she made a large fire in the ground, which, when burned out, made the sea and all the water. She then left plenty of blackfellows of both sexes and went further away into the bush, made more water and left more blackfellows, and gave each tribe a different language. After this she left a fire in the ground a long way in the bush, and set three blackfellows to watch it to prevent it breaking out. Should they neglect to look after it the fire will come and burn all blackfellows. "Warahmoorúngee," after walking about a little longer, died and turned into a stone a long way in the bush.

These natives have no idea of a future state of existence.

NOTE A.

Melville Island, about 30 miles north of Port Darwin, is inhabited by a tribe of which very little is known. They do not circumcise, and speak a different language from those on the mainland. They are represented as a very strong and powerful race.

Before the arrival of the Hon. B. T. Finniss at Escape Cliffs, in 1864, the Melville Island natives occasionally visited the mainland for the purpose of stealing lubras, in which they invariably succeeded; but they have not done so since. This tribe is of a very hostile nature, and on several occasions have attacked Europeans visiting the island. Their canoes and weapons are similar to those on the mainland.

NOTE B.

A tribe or tribes inhabiting the western coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, and for about 100 miles inland, between the Roper and Nicholson Rivers, have a most disgusting and unnatural practice of slitting the penis along the urethra from its opening right down to the root. When about the age of fourteen years the youth are circumcised by the old men without any particular ceremony or formality, and when about eighteen years old the operation of slitting up the urethra is performed on those selected for that purpose. It is done with

a sharp shell or mussel, and sometimes with a white flinty kind of quartz, which is procured from some distance under ground, and the hole is carefully covered up again. After the operation a small stick or bone is placed in the canal to keep it open. As the wound heals the penis shrivels up, and has, in its collapsed state, the appearance of a large button. According to the statement of the women the men so operated upon cannot beget children, although able to have connection with them, and for that purpose are preferred to the others. It appears that the strongest and able-bodied youths are generally selected for this operation, which is considered an honour among the tribe.

For the information on this subject I am indebted to Mr. George de Lautour, who has on several occasions travelled through these tribes, and at my request collected the above information.
