

femur, as they are also on the skull. The femurs exhibited showed clearly that Deeming's bone approximated to the primitive Barham thigh bone, more than to the modern bone. The points of importance are the angle of the neck of the femur, the shape of the shaft, and the comparison of the width of the respective condyles.

These specimens demonstrated the anatomical basis of Deeming's physical appearance and mode of walking. He

was described as a small man with long arms, who continually kept his head hanging down, and walked "with a kind of a limp, a slouching walk, a sort of shuffle."

The reason of the confusion in the minds of the mental specialists who examined Deeming is that they were dealing with a primitive brain which had turned criminal. In conclusion, the lecturer indicated the lines on which such cases should be treated.

## Some Recollections of the Aborigines of New South Wales in the Years 1848, 1849 and 1850

(By H. O'SULLIVAN WHITE.)

Through the courtesy of Mr. W. J. Enright we are able to publish this paper, which was read before the Maitland Scientific Society many years ago. Mr. H. O'Sullivan White was a Licensed Surveyor attached to the Lands Department of New South Wales. In his later years he worked in the Maitland district.

BEFORE commencing my recollections I may as well inform you that I am a native of the Hunter, and was born within two miles of this side of Singleton, in November, 1861, so that I am close on 64 years of age. I make this preliminary statement because it was in my boyhood and youth I obtained what knowledge I have of the Aborigines. What I write will be in a chronological and narrative form, without any pretensions to being scientific. I will remember them as a boy being very numerous about Singleton, then known as Patrick's Plains; they often visited my father's place, Greenwood, now owned by John Moore. Their principal place of encampment was on the property of the late John How, adjoining Greenwood on the one side and Singleton the other. It seemed to be a belief amongst the blacks of the Hunter that after death their future state would be that of white men, but I have since thought this may have been put into their heads by the whites who mixed with them, by way of a joke. I have a distinct remembrance of a large

corroborree taking place on the bank of the Hunter in one of Mr. How's paddocks somewhere near where the bridge now stands on the Westbrook road. There must have been close upon 400, if not more, present: they were not all Hunter blacks, the Macleay and Manning tribes helped to make up the number. It was a common occurrence in those days for adjoining tribes to meet and make their demonstrations, some of them having the appearance of warlike exercises, while others partook more of the character of a comedy. What was their purpose I have never learnt, but they have always seemed to me more like social gatherings than anything else. However, as I go along I have more corroborrees to speak of, and as I was then older and better able to observe, I took more notice and will give such their characteristics.

In the early part of the year 1848 my father received instructions from the then Surveyor-General, Sir T. L. Mitchell, to proceed over the Liverpool Range or, rather, the dividing range between the eastern and western waters,

to start the feature survey of that part of the colony, that is, to traverse the watercourses and ranges so that they might be charted, for up to that time they were unknown to all but the squatter, his stockmen, and shepherds. I accompanied my father on that occasion in the capacity of an assistant. There were five others, making seven in all, counting my father. It was while thus employed I saw a good deal of the blacks and their habits. We had one with us, a man about five and twenty; his name, he informed us, was Paddy Tighe, but who christened him he never said. I fancy he got his name from his humour, for he was full of it, and decidedly Irish in its character. We had him for nearly three years, and regretted his loss; he was seduced from us by a squatter. Paddy was a very intelligent black; he knew all the fixed stars of any magnitude, as well as the planets in our hemisphere, and where to look for them at particular seasons; each had its name, but unfortunately I cannot find the record. I have it somewhere; when it turns up I will with pleasure give the names to the Society. I remember only two, those of Venus and Arcturus, the former called Tyndrema, the latter Quoinbelong. They have names also for every inequality of the surface of the land; each water hole and bend in the streams have also their distinctive name, and of course each variety of timber is named; peculiarly formed trees are also noted. To such an extent did they carry out this talent that I have known them to direct a strange black a route to him otherwise unknown and the stranger to find it by the directions given from this knowledge. I will now proceed to give some information about a habit they had, which in some way must have applied to their religious belief.

One of a tribe, always a leading member, and generally well up in years, visited alone some inaccessible place in the mountains, there forming a circle of stones of considerable size, the circle being about seven feet in diameter. In this he was to stand and interview

the *wandah* or spirit (whether good or evil I never could make out, but held in great dread). The vigil lasted three days and three nights, the interview with the spirit only occurring in the night. The black who underwent this ordeal became the *caragy*, that is, chief director of his tribe. I have met with numbers of these stone circles, always on high points of the ranges and the country very broken, particularly amongst the Warrumbungle ranges. On the Castlereagh River I have met with them, also on the Nandewar Ranges between the Namoi and Gwydir. I do not put up for a scientist, so must leave it to them to elucidate. I but give what I have seen, but to me, untutored as I am, it seems a strange coincidence that these savages should make use of this mystic sign. They had tribal laws amongst themselves, which were strictly enforced. I was present at a council where one of the tribe was tried for some offence; his judges were the old men, who sat on their heels in a circle, the culprit standing in the centre. Each one of the old men made a speech, speaking with great dignity, and making use of their hands at turns to impress their hearers with what they said, and the audience uttering exclamations of assent or dissent as it struck them. Throughout the meeting the utmost quietness and gravity prevailed, and no meeting of civilized individuals could have been held with greater decorum. The culprit who replied to the accusation was acquitted on this occasion. Shortly after this event, while we were encamped at one of Rouse's stations on the Castlereagh, I saw a dozen or more young blacks who had at a recent *Borah* been made young men of, that is, they could take unto themselves wives, and have a voice in council. The wounds made in the operation of scarifying were quite fresh, and unhealed. Upon their arms, thighs, back and breasts were open wounds that could not have been more than three or four days old. I have never witnessed a *Borah*, nor, I fancy, has any other white man been permitted to do so.

I have heard from the blacks descriptions of portions of the ceremonies but as I cannot vouch for them, I do not give them. I have seen numbers of the *Borah* grounds. The place chosen for these ceremonies is generally the top of a flat ridge, and the trees around the spot fixed upon, about an acre or two, are carved for about twelve feet from the ground. There seem to be two patterns, one curved, the other angular; many of these places can still be traced. Within late years I have seen one of them near the head of the Williams River.



Man and Lubra, north-west of Western Australia.

On one occasion I witnessed the death and burial of an old blackfellow. We were encamped at the time—early in 1849—on the banks of the Macquarie River, where the town of Dubbo now stands, and close to us a tribe of Aborigines had their camp. Death was the result of old age. I well remember seeing the old man when he was dying, stretched on a possum

rug in a rude back gonyah. As soon as life had departed, a great commotion took place in the camp, the gins yelling and tearing their hair, several of the men preparing the body for burial. This was done by doubling up the corpse, bringing the chin between the knees, wrapping possum rugs around it, and binding it in this position with the belts taken from their loins; these were rudely netted sashes some six feet in length—all the men at that time wore them—to which in front and behind were appended bunches consisting of strips of kangaroo skin tied together, and which was the only covering they ever wore. No sooner was the body thus tied up than one of them took it upon his shoulders, others relieving him when he got tired, and moved off with it to the sand ridges back from the river, the whole lot stringing after the body, the gins apparently lamenting as they went along, and in fifteen minutes after the death not a black remained in the camp. They buried him on a sand ridge about a mile from the river. They took considerable pains in doing this. After making a hole some three or four feet deep (it was very soft), they placed the body in it just as it was bound, that is, in a sitting posture, and covered it up. They then described a circle around the grave, taking the grave for the centre, about sixteen feet in diameter, and then, with small wooden spades made from the myall wood (used by them for grub hunting to dig along the roots of the gum trees, exposing the hole of the grub, which was hooked out with a twig, large white ones being considered by them a great delicacy), carefully removing the earth from within the circle, and formed with it a dome-shaped mound over the grave, its outer edge being about two feet from the rim of the circle. They then carved the trees around it in the same way that their borah grounds were done. Part of Dubbo must now stand where this tomb was so carefully raised by the poor blacks. Little did they foresee when engaged in their task that the town of the white man would stand o'er his grave.

I will now endeavour to give you some idea of the skill of the Aborigines in tracking, or trucking as they have it in America. We were, at the time of the occurrence I am about to relate, encamped at the confluence of Cox's Creek with the Namoi, the present site of Boggabri. A hut keeper in the employment of a Mr. Denman was lost in the scrub at the back of the rock known as Coopabirndi, this was in the winter of 1850. I went out with two blacks, the before-mentioned Paddy being one of them, to try and find him. He was a wooden legged man, an old servant of the late Helenus Scott, of Glendon, who had found his way up the country. We had no difficulty in getting on his track, on account of the wooden leg. We followed it over rocks and stones, sometimes losing it from the nature of the country. Whenever this took place, a mark was made where the last track was found, then the blacks would start from the mark and, moving in opposite directions, upon their hands and knees, each leaf, stick and stone was carefully examined and, moving in a circular direction so as to meet further on at some distance from the mark, by this means they invariably recovered the track. We found five of the poor man's camps, formed of boughs. He must have wandered round and round, but we never found him. A violent storm of rain came on, obliterating the tracks, and, although we, knowing he must have been close to us, coo-ee'd, fired guns off and searched the scrub around, we could get no trace of him, and had to abandon him to his fate. I saw an account in the *Maitland Mercury* seventeen years afterwards of the finding of his skeleton, wooden leg and all, close to where we lost the track.

I must now give you some further accounts of corroborees. One that I saw on the Meeki was very remarkable from the way the blacks were rigged out. The blacks informed me it came from Queensland. They evidently used to transmit these ceremonies from one tribe to the other, thus resembling more civilized communitons with their plays.

Each performer was got up in a curious way. Besides being painted white and red in a hideous way, each man had three lances attached to him, some eight feet in length, with tufts on the upper ends, one lance on each side, the other in the centre of the back, secured at the loins and shoulders, their hair being spread out as much as possible, having a singular effect in the light given by the moon and fires. They went through their evolutions in time to the chant of the gins and, when they lined up, as it were, in front of an enemy, made them look very imposing.

I will give one more account of a corroboree of a different character that I witnessed in New England in November, 1850, two miles this side of Armidale. There were some 600 in all, including the Macleay and Clarence River blacks, as well as those of New England. The plot, for so I must call it, was a singular one, and very laughable in its *dénouement*. Picture to yourself this number of blacks massed in a body, all elaborately painted white and red before the large fires lighted for the occasion, forming a square within which you could not see. All at once, in time to their rude chant, opening out to the right and left into line with as much precision as soldiers on parade, an object coming into view which puzzled you to say what it was. At last you discover it to be a blackfellow all smeared over with honey, to which adhered the white down of birds, giving him a most grotesque appearance. According to them he represents the *debil debil* by hopping before them while they execute a war dance, their spears pointed towards him as if for throwing, and their feet coming to the ground together, in time to the beat of the gins. They are excellent time keepers—they never make a mistake—when going through their performances, which they generally finish off about twelve o'clock.

The morning after the corroboree I was a spectator of, I imagine, what few whites have witnessed, that is, the carrying out of a sentence passed upon

an Aboriginal by his tribe for the stealing of a gin belonging to another tribe. The sentence was that he should have twelve spears thrown at him from a distance of twelve paces. The only protection allowed him to guard against the spears was a small shield, called by them a *heileman*, made of hard wood about four inches wide where the hand hold was, about fifteen inches long, pointed at both ends. Every spear was thrown by a different black, and with all the force of the thrower, and true to its mark. Every one he met with his *heileman*, and they glanced off, leaving him unharmed. His position while receiving them was sitting on his hams. I was close to him, and he never shrank. His nerve must have been great. After the punishment was over there was a general scrimmage. From what cause I did not learn. The coast blacks, that is, those of the Macleay and Clarence River, separated from the New England blacks, then one from each body stepped out in front, armed only with a boomerang. Then they commenced running up and down, talking away, evidently abusing one another, and getting steam up, till it came to bursting point, when they each let a boomerang go along the ground in a vicious manner. This was the sequel of battle, and the fight became general. They used nothing but

boomerangs and waddies. It was soon over, neither side as far as I could see getting the better of it. There were none killed; a few cut about the legs from the boomerangs, and some with bruised heads from the waddies were all the casualties. After it was over they seemed as friendly as ever. This was the only blacks' fight I ever witnessed, and a very harmless one it was.

I have no knowledge of the native dialects. The Wiraguri was spoken upon the Macquarie and Castlereagh Rivers, and the Kamilaroi on the Namoi and Bundarra Rivers.

Some of the finest physical specimens of the race were blacks I saw upon the Barwon, fellows standing over six feet and built in proportion. They were in a primitive state, as active as cats, and the way they could climb a large gum tree was a caution. To see one tackle a gum tree five feet through, straight, without a limb for sixty feet, no assistance from anything but a small tomahawk, would astonish you. The mode of procedure consisted of cutting two notches, the first one about the level of his hip, the other above his head. Ascending these, he again repeats the operation, and continues so to do until he reaches the top, never faltering on his way. I have never heard of, nor seen, one fall.