

EXTRACTS FROM: H.T.EBSWORTH'S A LETTERBOOK OR JOURNAL IN  
THE FORM OF A LETTER BOOK, KEPT ... AT SYDNEY  
AND PORT STEPHENS 4826. M.L. B852<sup>-2</sup>

Ebsworth's Purpose: "...my intention is to amuse ... to excite  
your interest ..." (p.51)

Description of Port Stephens: "The country around Port Stephens  
is bold and interesting. Numerous islands diversify the inner  
harbour, and the Karuer River winding its course amid alternate  
Hills and Dales, present a constant change of Scenery at every  
turn. The hills are everywhere clothed with wood, with constant  
verdure beneath it, unaccompanied by any Bush or Underwood, so  
that one is often forcibly reminded of Gentlemen's pleasure gr-  
ounds in the distance, on the Banks of a River, in England..." (p.51)

Favourably impressed with the natives: "...whilst drawing comparison  
between the Actions of the Natives and those from my own Country-  
men, I am often obliged to form decisions prejudicial to the latter  
and at the same time illustrative of the natural good feelings and  
gentleness of the former." (p.55)

"One ought never to forget that they are the untutored Children  
of nature, wild from habit and unaccustomed only to a certain train  
of ideas peculiar to themselves. We bear in mind, that they have  
not been brought up to labour, and that if too much be expected and  
exacted, their friendship may soon cease for us, and we may be  
wholly deprived of their valuable services.

I have been very minute in my narration of the Natives, wishing  
to redeem them from the Character which, many of my Countrymen  
have given them of stupidity, and a want of the common feelings  
belonging to their species." (pp.113-4)

Further description of Port Stephens: "On the seventh day we  
entered Port Stephens; the beauty of the scenery and calmness of the  
water were delightful after the tossing rolling I had so lately  
experienced. The Heads are formed by two Rocks rising majestically  
from the sea; the southern shores of the Harbour presented a variety  
of conical Hills, thickly wooded, and which produced a pleasing  
contrast to the flat Country on the opposite Coast; before us rose  
extensive and highly elevated Hills, rendered more beautiful by the  
different tints of Green and Brown, with which they were decorated  
to their summits." (pp.35-6)

First impressions of Carrington and Tahlee: "We advanced about two  
hundred yards into a thick wood, when suddenly I observed a group  
of savages who were standing round a blazing fire... At first the  
appearance of the natives was terrifying rather, but their good  
humour soon expelled every unpleasant idea ... As we passed along,  
winding through the trees, a black would occasionally dart across  
the way with a lighted torch; imparting to the whole a dreary,

wild and savage appearance; several fires surrounded by troops of natives lay along our path. We lost our way and wandered around, now stumbling over rugged stones, then wandering through seeds and long grass above our heads, again groping through thick plantations; quite exhausted, we at length distinguished fires through the forest, which guided us to the village consisting of Bark Huts. From thence we proceeded towards Tarlee... The lofty trees, rising in thick clusters, nearly shut the heavens from my view, and prevented the eye from penetrating far into the dark perspective. The dying embers of three large fires threw their feeble light into the distant shade. Not a breeze murmured amongst the trees and all was calm. The tents, the bark Huts and the appearance of ten or a dozen natives lying asleep around a fire, intermingling with our Dogs formed a curious and interesting scene. If practicable I will enclose you a sketch of the spot taken after the trees had been cleared, which has dispelled the gloominess of the scene, and opened a fine perspective of land and water." (pp.36-40)

The population of natives; their encampment: "The tribe of natives belonging to Fort Stephens amount to nearly two hundred men, women and children... The Aboriginal Camp has a strange appearance during night; you are encompassed by twenty or thirty fires, each of which is attended by four or more natives, according to the number of the family. The blaze of some, reflecting upon the savages within their influence present a wild and terrific sight, whilst others, by the feeble light emitted by their dying embers practically illumine the surrounding objects..." (pp.57-8)

Natives assist settlers: "On the first arrival of Mr Dawson, they were found particularly useful in procuring Bark for the erection of Huts, and without their assistance, I know not what would have been done. When treated well nothing is to be feared from them, but cruelty and oppression on the part of Europeans meet with its reward from them. . . (p.57) Several natives attend us regularly; our Boat's Crew consist of six most excellent fellows, who handle the oar with the expertness of experienced seamen; other are employed as messengers; some attend at table; in short we find them useful in every department. One little black Gin is an excellent washer... One of the highest honours that can be conferred on them, is to make them constables, provided they have Staff. That the honour may not be too cheap three only have been advanced to this station. It is ridiculous beyond measure to see the consequence: they assume over their people, and they never appear but with their staff of office under their arm. (p.59) Two lime kilns were burning, to which about thirty natives, men and women, were conveying oyster shells ... (p.41) The Blacks who work when inclination prompts them, receive Tobacco and Corn meal for their labour ... (p.42

Effects of European influences: "The natives who are constantly about us are clothed, the females in Flaid Gowns, the men and boys with Flaid Jackets and Trousers, some have caps of the same material, which imparts quite a martial appearance to the wearers." (p.59)

"The Blacks who work ... receive Tobacco and Corn meal for their labour, they are extravagantly fond of the former: they are very partial to biscuit, bread or flour, with the latter they knead and bake cakes in the ashes after the manner of our White People. Their favourite food is boiled meal, made of ground Indian corn, and next to it, the corn roasted in the ashes as chestnuts; they are also inordinately fond of Sugar: it is a great treat to give them an indian bag in which sugar has been packed, this they cut into pieces and boil in water; they sometimes drink this liquor till they become intoxicated, are fairly blown out and like an ox in clover, and are unable longer to enjoy this delightful beverage." (p.42)

Relations with timber-cutters; policy of Ebsworth towards natives:

"They are naturally a mild and harmless race of savages, and whenever any mischief has been done by them, I believe the cause has generally arisen from the ill treatment of their white neighbours. We ~~are~~ have always endeavoured to give them an interest in cultivating our friendship on our part.

They have commonly been treated in different parts of the Country as though they had been dogs, and shot indiscriminately by convict servants. More of this has perhaps occurred here, and on the Banks of the Rivers running into this Harbour, than in any other part of the Colony, and it has arisen from these circumstances. Speculators in Timber formerly obtained licences from the Governor to cut Cedar and Blue Gum for exportation upon land not located; these valuable species of timber generally grow upon the Banks of Rivers, and a ~~large~~ large quantity having been discovered in this quarter, parties of Sawyers and Fallers were employed to procure it. These are generally desperadoes, emancipists as they are called, and not unfrequently Convicts accompany them, the whole superintended by an overseer, who is generally selected as a fit leader for this kind of banditti. These people were the first who came in contact with the natives; they contrived to conciliate them whilst they could make them useful as guided, or in procuring them Kangaroos and other game; but they were sure to give the natives some cause for offence ere long, either by shooting, striking them, or taking away their Gins (wives), and the consequences were what would naturally have been expected. These wild men lay in ambush, and speared their oppressors whenever they could, and in return the sawyers were obliged, for their own protection to shoot them on all occasions that presented themselves, 'till at length the Blacks obliged them in many instances to abandon their stations; they then went in search for others, where they again created the same kind of evils, which were followed by similar results. Port Stephens was nearly cleared of all its cedar and most valuable wood by these devastating parties. When the settlement was first formed, the natives showed our people many Orphans whose parent

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-s, they said, had been shot by white men, and on one occasion, they pointed out a white man, who came to buy provisions for his party who were employed up the River Karuer, who they said, had shot ten; the wretch did not deny it, but replied, that he would kill them whenever he could; for his brutality he obtained no provisions from us. (pp. 43-5)

"It is possible, although I think improbable that circumstances may occur to interrupt the good understanding which at present exists between us and the natives, for the latter are savages in the common acceptation of the term, although they exhibit stronger traits of natural good feeling towards each other, than people under that denomination are generally found to do." (p. 45)

## Manners and Customs:

"To become acquainted with the manners and the customs of a barbarous and savage people, a residence of some duration amongst their tribes is requisite. It affords opportunities of forming correct notions of their character, and prevents our entertaining erroneous ideas which a more cursory acquaintance is liable to impart." (p. 73)

"The conduct of our own tribes has convinced us, that when well used, they will become faithful and attached to their European Masters, but, that on the contrary, injuries will not be endured by them with impunity!" (pp.73-74)

Segregation of Labour: "... shortly after the birth of a female Child, if the parents intend it for a fisherwoman, one joint of the left hand little finger is amputated, and when grown up she ever follows that occupation." (p. 74)

Initiation Ceremonies: "When boys approach to manhood, they are admitted as one of the tribe of Warriors; on these occasions a kind of fete is held amongst them and the new member undergoes the operation of having a front tooth knocked out." (p. 74)

Influence of Europeans; Fauna: "They are excellent Marksmen, and we often lend them a Musket to shoot Kangaroo, this they always return in good order, and generally present with it one of these animals, or a Wallaby, which is a smaller species of Kangaroo." (p. 74)

Movement and Territory: "When away from the Establishment they appear to have no settled place of residence, although they have a certain district of Country they call their own, and in some parts of which they are always to be found; " (p. 75)

Leadership : "... they have ceremonies common to all the tribes, and meet in large bodies to inflict punishment on Members who offend against established rules, but I cannot discover the Authority by which they are convened to determine the measure of punishment, nor who is the regulator of the ceremonies." (p. 75)

Punishment: "I have heard but of one punishment, and that I believe is inflicted for all offences, that of the culprits standing for a certain period to defend himself against the spears which any of the assembled multitude think proper to hurl at him. He has a small shield of an oval form, about two feet and a half in length, and fifteen inches in breadth. The offender protects himself so dexterously by it, as seldom to receive any injury; Instances have occurred of persons being killed, but very rarely; their limbs and muscles are so pliable, that they ~~properly~~ perfectly cover themselves with this shield." (pp. 75-76)

Inter-tribal Fighting: "Then one tribe of natives receives any injury from another, hostilities are commenced immediately; a challenge is conveyed to the tribe from whom the insult has been received; and they meet on an appointed day to decide their differences by a battle. Much parley takes place in tones of stern defiance; they menace each other ~~by brandishing their spears flourishing~~ →

by brandishing their spears, flourishing their clubs, stamping with their feet, and using every aggravating means to excite the anger of their opponents; At length they approach, pushing each other violently about; tones of defiance becoming more vehement, 'till at length, they are worked up to a state of fury, and look more like demons than like men; bawling out woṛ, woṛ, woṛ, (buzzing and dwelling on the r.) They then fall to with their heavy Waddies (Clubs) upon each others heads, dealing out blows, that would fell an ox, 'till some fall and are disabled, which occasions a terrific shout or yell from the conquerers, in token of the Victory; this they continue until quite exhausted, when they disperse with their heads broken and bleeding. They seldom kill eachother, which must be attributed to the thickening of their skulls. Their spears are not used on these occasions, although they carry them to the fight, and manoeuvre with them. " (pp. 76-77)

Waddy: "The Iron Bark Wood of which they are generally made is exceedingly hard, and nearly the weight of iron." (p. 77)

Family: "The wives of the blacks are called Gins. When a poor Gin offends her sable lord, he taps her over the head with this weapon in no very gentle manner". (pp. 77-78)

European Influence: " On our first coming to the settlement this was a common practice amongst them, but being given to understand that this treatment of their Gins was displeasing to white men, and would not be permitted, I am happy to say, the practice has become nearly obsolete amongst them." (p. 78)

Skill With Weapons; "The quickness of the men is truly astonishing; they throw their spears at the distance of forty yards with the greatest precision, and cunningly kill birds by throwing stones from the hand. They run up the tallest and largest trees with great rapidity, with a Tomahawk in one hand they cut notches as they ascend; this they do to cut opossums, a small animal, the size of a rabbit, out of them, and also to procure wild honey, which is deposited thence by a small bee, not larger than a common fly." (pp. 78-79)

Women "The women are very ingenious; they form fishhooks from the oyster shell, and make string from bark with great facility, equally as good as can be purchased in England; they twist and roll the bark in a curious manner with the palm of the hand upon the leg; with this string they form nets of curious workmanship. In some the Meshes are very small and neat, and the whole is without a knot, excepting at its completion; these nets are slung by a string round their forehead, and hang behind them,; They are used like workbags or reticules, containing all the articles they convey with them from place to place, such as their Fishing hooks, prepared Bark for string; gum for gluing their spears, and sometimes oysters, or fish, when they move from the shore to the Station; in addition to this net, they generally have a child across their shoulders, and thus burdened, they march off with the men." (pp. 79-80)

Division of Labour: "As amongst all rude and savage people, the women are considered by the men as inferior beings, and made to do the all the drudgery; to carry the wood for fires, and convey from place to place, everything with which they move about, the Implements of Man alone excepted, which are always carried by the Men." (p. 80)

Food: "Their food consists of fish when near the coast, but in the woods of opossum, Bandicoots, and any other animal they may spear or catch, also of a kind of grub, found in decayed wood. Should they perchance spear a Kangaroo, they have a regular feast; they are by no means particular in their diet, for they devour, when half roasted in the ashes, the whole of an animal, fish, or bird, the bones alone excepted." (pp. 80-81)

Children: "The Natives are remarkably fond of their Children; and orphans are adopted by unmarried men and women, who take equally as much care of them, as though they were their own offspring." (p. 81)

Adaptation to Environment: "... in winter or rainy weather they cut large sheets of bark, creep under them, and thus are sheltered from the cold and wet. So long as the Natives continue wandering from place to place, this is the most simple plan they could adopt; they are very sparing of their labour, and appear to have no idea of erecting anything as a permanent residence." (pp. 81-82)

Canoes: "Their canoes are of the roughest workmanship, being nothing but a sheet of Bark prepared and tied together at either end; yet they venture miles from land when fishing and manage them with great dexterity." (p. 82)

Mourning: "When any of their relations die, the Women show respect to their memories by plastering their heads and faces with a substance resembling pipeclay which remains 'till it casually falls off. They also sear the thigh severely and bind a portion of their Bark round the wound; this operation renders them lame for many weeks, and this is putting themselves in mourning;... When any near and dear connection dies, they plaster themselves over the body as far as the hip bones, which renders them most hideous and wretched looking beings; whenever a black dies we know it immediately for the whole tribe commence howling most piteously, which may be heard two miles distant from the camp." (p. 82)

Beliefs: "Should anyone, who is unwell, be asked, What ails him, the answer is invariably 'O Dat Dāble Dāble'- which means that the Devil or some evil spirit had visited them." (p. 83) "I cannot learn whether they worship any god or not. They think highly of the Moon, for at its changes they always hold their Corrobery or dance; they fancy the woods are inhabited by an evil spirit who appears to them occasionally and is always seen upon the death of one of the tribe; this of course is imagination- They appear to have some confused notions of a resurrection, but they are not sufficiently acquainted with our language to illustrate them." (p. 83)

Numeration: "They have no idea of numbers beyond five, which are reckoned by the fingers; when they wish to express a number not exceeding five, they hold up so many fingers; but more ~~than~~ are expressed by 'murry tousand' - many thousand.

Conclusions : "I think it would be an arduous task to civilize them , they are so partial to a wandering life, that were any constraint placed upon them, they would disappear, and seek amongst the woods their usual course of existance." (p. 84)