

Published by Authority of the New South Wales Commissioners
for the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.

NOTES ON THE ABORIGINES

OF

NEW SOUTH WALES:

BY

THE HON. RICHARD HILL, M.L.C., AND THE HON. GEORGE
THORNTON, M.L.C.

WITH PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF THE TRIBES
FORMERLY LIVING IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF SYDNEY
AND THE SURROUNDING DISTRICTS.



Sydney:

CHARLES POTTER, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, PHILLIP-STREET.

1892.

Published by Authority of the New South Wales Commissioners
for the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.

NOTES ON THE ABORIGINES

OF

NEW SOUTH WALES:

BY

THE HON. RICHARD HILL, M.L.C., AND THE HON. GEORGE
THORNTON, M.L.C.

WITH PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF THE TRIBES
FORMERLY LIVING IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF SYDNEY
AND THE SURROUNDING DISTRICTS.



Sydney:

CHARLES POTTER, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, PHILLIP-STREET.

1892.

Published by Authority of the New South Wales Commissioners
for the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.

NOTES ON THE ABORIGINES

OF

NEW SOUTH WALES:

BY

THE HON. RICHARD HILL, M.L.C., AND THE HON. GEORGE
THORNTON, M.L.C.

WITH PERSONAL REMINISCENCES OF THE TRIBES
FORMERLY LIVING IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF SYDNEY
AND THE SURROUNDING DISTRICTS.



Sydney:

CHARLES POTTER, GOVERNMENT PRINTER, PHILLIP-STREET.

1892.

Notes on the Aborigines of New South Wales

BY THE HON. RICHARD HILL, M.L.C.

WHEN the writer, a native of Sydney, was a young fellow, some sixty years ago, he remembers perfectly well that the aborigines used to assemble at intervals in large numbers, sometimes on very friendly terms, and at other times to settle, by fighting, difficulties arising, sometimes from murder, and perhaps oftener from the taking away of a "gin" (woman) by force, but in either case such misdeeds were never allowed to pass without punishment.

Sydney was looked upon as the central position, where at most times the blacks met to settle their grievances, and when a large meeting, 300 or 400, was to take place, regardless of the cause, whether it was to be a friendly "corroboree," which was a dance and thorough merry-making, or to adjust differences of a serious character, it was really surprising how the messages were set going from one tribe to the other as if by magic, even at long distances.

The "Cammaragals" were blacks belonging to the North Shore, and the district "Cammara," extended from the northern part of our harbour, say, from North Head to the Lane Cove River, or Estuary, right away north to the Hawkesbury, and away east to the sea-coast. This was a very powerful tribe, and the more so as it was often joined by the Parramatta, and sometimes by the Windsor and Richmond blacks, and although in near proximity to each other, the language differed a little, yet many words were alike, which enabled them to understand each other pretty well; but it was apparent to the whites who took an interest in these meetings that a difficulty in their language existed, and so with those that came from Liverpool, and the tribes of which extended down in one way along the southern shore of George's River away to Botany Heads, embracing "Nannunggurrung," now "Bottle Forest," down along the northern shore of Port Hacking to the coast, where they joined the well-known Botany blacks. At the two places they amounted to a pretty large number. I may say fairly that I have seen hundreds assemble on "Hyde Park" on more than one occasion, either to corroboree (dance) or for a man to "stand punishment." The culprit had to stand alone, about a hundred yards from the assembled mob, with nothing to defend himself with but a small piece of wood, sometimes bark (Heillamong) made thin, say, from 3 to 4 feet long, and about a foot wide in the centre, where a place was formed to put the hand in, and from the centre to each end it was tapered along the sides to a point, and the dexterity with which a man could defend himself against showers of spears was a marvel to those that witnessed it at various times, and it was a rare thing, indeed, if he did not defend himself successfully; but when a man was hit, either fatally or otherwise, his friend rushed in, which was a signal to stop the spear throwing, and in almost every instance, the row was ended after some fighting with waddies among the offended parties; but as night drew on most of them repaired to "Wullamulla," now Woolloomooloo, and fires were lit in all directions, and yarning and cracking jokes took place until nearly daylight. At this period

oysters, muscles, and fish were plentiful, which enabled them to get food without stint. Not so now; we have taken away nearly all that nature had given to them. Their fishing and hunting grounds are gone, and, by way of exchange, we have introduced into their midst, in its worst form, disease, to say nothing about intoxicating drinks, which have helped in a large degree to kill them out. But happily, as a last resource, mission stations have been formed, and an Aboriginal Protectorate Board has been established in Sydney to attend to the wants of these poor people; and to do this, a large grant of several thousands annually is voted by Parliament.

It was the writer's habit, even up to a very recent date, to spend weeks at a time fishing, shooting, and kangarooing, which enables him to say that a blackfellow in his way, as a rule, is very clever, and if properly managed is always the life and soul of the party, full of humour, an excellent mimic, and with the mutting (four-pronged spear) are not easily surpassed as fishermen, and in the bush hunting he has no superior; untiring, and always first to see the game. When our hunting has extended over a large area of several miles, and kangaroos are caught, especially in the morning, they are hung up on trees to be picked up on our way to the camp; then it is something wonderful to see how, apparently without an effort, the blacks go from tree to tree, even though miles separate them, to get the game, and when they reach the camp, mostly tired and sore-footed, after some tea, something to eat, a glass of grog, their humour and fun, or rather tone of talk, begins. In fact, if you will talk with them, they will keep it up to a very late hour; but when morning (daylight) comes, they are the most difficult beings in the world to rouse; but when once up, as I said before, they are the life and soul of the party, if in good hands.

Their habits are pretty nearly the same from one end of the country to the other, of a migratory character, never long in one place, owing perhaps to this fact, that having to find their own food they are compelled to move on from place to place, mostly confining themselves to their own district.

A blackfellow never thinks of to-morrow. If you give him in the shape of food as much as should last him two days, he will consume it in one, if possible, and trust to chance for the next. In almost every instance they are kind and affectionate to their children and most indulgent. In the early days in the districts to which I have alluded hundreds were to be found, but nearly all are dead—certainly not a Botany aborigine is now living; and I may say the same of Sydney, Cammeray, Parramatta, or Liverpool—all are gone, and drink has been the principal cause!

BY THE HON. GEORGE THORNTON, M.L.C.

WHEN the continent of Australia was first taken possession of by the British the aborigines were very numerous, especially along the eastern coast (New South Wales), which was for a long time the only part populated by Europeans. At that time the natives were physically a superior race to what they are at present, the men being robust and muscular, and the women being exceedingly well formed and good looking. The average height of the men then was about 5 feet 10 inches; and, as stated before, they were excellently proportioned, as also were the females. I refer especially to the aborigines who then inhabited the coast to as far north as Point Danger.

Being a native of the Colony, I have been familiar with the native blacks and their customs from childhood, and from my own observation can assert that

they are possessed of great natural intelligence, and their power of sight and hearing is phenomenal. Their ability to track a person, even over the surface of a rock, is too well known to need any reference to it here.

In their primitive state they were more than gallant, they were chivalrous, in their sense of natural and mutual duties. In the case of an offence which infringed their laws relating to the protection of their females, the culprit was punished in the following manner:—He was placed by himself, away from any cover, and a band of the most expert spearsmen of the tribe stood at a distance of sixty to a hundred yards; at a given signal, the latter threw their weapons at the law-breaker, at exactly the same moment, and if he managed to evade the spears his life was spared; this, however, as may be imagined, was a matter of extreme difficulty.

No doubt, like all uncivilised races, the Australian aborigines have all the cunning and selfishness which is inseparable from a primitive state, but from Gabo Island to Point Danger (which is as far as my knowledge extends) I have found them to be bold and spirited, and generally speaking they have pleasing countenances, and my opinion of them is that they are not, as is asserted, lazy and good for nothing. As an instance of their chivalry and courage, I may mention a custom which prevailed among them:—When two men, for any reason, agreed to fight "to the death," came together, each would invite the other to strike first, in fact, the orthodox greeting or signal in matters of this kind was "hit me first," each, at the same time, offering his head to be struck. A well-known historical instance of their bravery may be gathered from the well-known anecdote referring to their stubborn resistance to Governor Phillip at a place in Sydney Harbour, the native name of which was "Kayeemy"; as the boat approached the shore the natives rushed into the water up to their necks to try and prevent the party from landing, but Governor Phillip persisting, one of the natives, named "Willemerung," threw a spear, which pierced the Governor's back. To commemorate the event, and appreciating this display of courage and determination, Governor Phillip called the place "Manly." As before stated, the spot where the spear was thrown was called in the native tongue "Kayeemy," but the aboriginal name of Manly proper was "Cannae."

The aboriginal race have no idea of a Supreme Being, and, in my opinion, are not susceptible of religious impression, but have a strong universal belief in evil spirits. Though the belief in these spirits is general, each district or tribe has its own particular theory as to the shape in which the dreaded phantom appears. In every instance, however, the blacks believe that the aim of these "Devil Devils" (which is the anglicised term) is destruction to those unfortunates who happen to fall in their way. The evil spirit of the Sydney, Botany, and southern district, including Port Hacking, was called by the natives of that tract of country "Boonbolong," and their belief was that it was represented by a very little man, a dwarf in fact, who prowled about at night, and was impervious to shot, ball, spear, or, in fact, any weapon. There was, however, a chance of escape for the unhappy creature who encountered this demon; if he knew a certain password, he was let go, but if not he (or she) would be devoured. The belief was that when the "Devil Devil" met a black, the latter would be accosted as follows, in the native tongue—"Name your mother"; if the answer were immediately given, "Boonbolong," the native was to liberty to depart, but failing to give the password would be devoured. The evil spirit in the Newcastle and Port Stephens districts was called "Koen," and was represented as being an

animal very much like a camel, but much larger. Their theory was that this "Devil Devil" would devour any blackfellow whom he found asleep, in the same manner as "Boonbolong."

Not all the philosophy in the world (in my opinion) will ever dispossess the aboriginal mind of the idea of evil spirits, nor do they seem able to grasp the doctrine of a Supreme Being. They are firm believers in the doctrine of Metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls, and have a firm conviction that a chatterer, whether man or woman, will reappear on this earth as a laughing-jackass, a sly sneaking fellow will be a "Warrigal," or native dog, and so on, the animal that the soul reinhabits corresponding with the nature of the person; for instance, a savage spiteful man would reappear as an eaglehawk.

The natives all over the continent, at the time the first white people arrived for the purposes of settlement, were subject to a disease resembling small-pox; the native name of this disease was "Galgala," and it was known to the early settlers as "Native Pock." Most of the aborigines, especially the men, were subject to this malady, which left "pock marks" on the cheeks, and on the nose. The English small-pox, which was introduced among the natives in the early days of the Colony, carried off hundreds of them. At North Shore, Botany, and other places wherever it had spread, their bodies were found years afterwards in scores, especially along the coast.

Their strength and muscular power, to which I have alluded before, I attribute to the nature of the food in use along the coast by the aborigines, such as fish, oysters, mussels, kangaroos, opossums, and abundance of game, which was to be found at that time along the coast, and on which the aborigines subsisted for some fifty years after the colonisation of the country. It is worthy of mention that no aboriginal native will eat an oyster uncooked, and I myself share their opinion that a raw oyster is most indigestible, despite what medical men may say to the contrary. About fifty years ago I asked one of the natives of the Port Stephens district why they roasted the oysters before eating, and told him they were good eaten raw, at the same time asking him to open some for me. "No, master," was the reply, "if we eat them that way, give sore here" (at the same time pointing to his abdomen). At several places along the coast there are to be found piles of oyster-shells, which have been roasted; these are, I dare say, the accumulations of perhaps centuries. In many instances these piles or heaps are as much as 50 feet deep.

They were extremely skilful in throwing the spear, being capable of killing kangaroos, &c., at very great distances. They also had two or three sorts of "Boomerangs"; one for amusement, known in their own language as the "Come-back" boomerang; another for warlike purposes, which was cut a slightly different shape from the "Come-back"; and also a third variety, for killing game, or anything that ran along the ground. They caught their fish with the aid of a spear called a "Mutting," which had four prongs, pointed with fish-bones, and made fast with a gum which exudes from the grass-tree. They sallied forth for the purpose of catching fish at night, armed with the "Mutting" and a torch. As is well known, fish are attracted to a light, and as they swam towards the light thrown by the torch the natives struck them with the "Mutting," capturing great numbers in this manner. The spear is generally made from the common "bulrush," or grass-tree.

As a general rule, the blacks are very affectionate, exhibiting extreme fondness for their families. Polygamy existed, and does exist, all over the continent, a man not being restricted to one wife; if he were able to feed two or three, he was at perfect liberty to have that number, and families of this description lived in perfect unity.

