

ART. I.—*The Burbung of the Darkinung Tribes.*

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Introductory.—The initiation ceremonies described in this article represent those practised by the aboriginal tribes spread over the coastal district of New South Wales, from Newcastle southerly to about Sydney, comprising approximately the Counties of Northumberland, Hunter, Cook, and the greater part of the County of Cumberland. One of the principal dialects was the Darkinung, which was spoken by the tribes occupying the country on the southern side of the Hunter River, from Jerry's Plains downwards towards Maitland, extending southerly to Wollombi Brook, Putty Creek, and including the Macdonald, Colo, and Hawkesbury Rivers. Amongst other dialects employed within the boundaries indicated may be mentioned the Wannungine, and Darrook; but it is probable that in former times there were others of less importance, which have entirely disappeared at the present day.

A small remnant of the Darkinung Tribe, numbering about sixty persons—men, women, and children—are at present located on a Government Reserve on the left bank of the Hawkesbury River, about twelve miles below Windsor, and consist chiefly of half-castes. There are now only two initiated men surviving in this tribe—Joe Gooburra, a pure black, and Charley Clark, a half-caste—both being old and infirm, and likely to pass away at any time. It was from these two old men, with whom I have been acquainted for some years, that I obtained the particulars given in the following pages.

The Main Camp and Burbung Ground.—The locality selected for the gathering of the tribes is in some place where there is a good camping ground, with plenty of water for camp use, and also where native game is numerous enough to provide food for the people. The local mob are of course the first to occupy the

ground, and the several tribes who subsequently arrive pitch their respective camps around the former, following the invariable rule of each mob camping on the side facing their own country.

In a convenient place, in close proximity to the main encampment, a circular space, called the *gooraboolan*, was cleared, and the surface soil scraped off in making it level was used to form an embankment around it. A narrow pathway, formed by clearing the ground and scraping the surface smooth, led from this circle to another of somewhat smaller dimensions, bounded by a similar raised earthen wall. The distance between these two circles depended on the character of the ground; if the space between them was scrubby, or some high ground intervened, the distance might not be greater than a quarter-of-a-mile, but if the country was open and flat, the distance from one circle to the other might be half-a-mile or more. The track entered both these circles through an opening, about three feet wide, left in the embankment for the purpose.

Inside the farther ring were a few posts, about four feet high, prepared in the following manner. Some straight saplings, about three or four inches in diameter, were cut in lengths of about five feet, and the bark taken off them. Holes were then dug in the floor of the ring, about a foot deep, into which the posts were inserted, and rammed to make them firm. Sometimes there were only two of these stumps, on other occasions three, and on others four; their number being regulated by the number of "doctors," or clever men, who were expected to perform feats of bringing substances out of their bodies while standing in the ring. At the base of each post a white stone (*ngooyar*) was laid on the ground, and a string (*birrawun*) was stretched from the top of each post to the top of the one next it. Several blackfellows gathered round a *coolamin*, and the head man made a small cut in the arms of each; they then held their hand over the *coolamin* into which the blood flowed from the wounds. The blood thus collected was rubbed on the stumps erected inside the ring, and the *coolamin* containing the remainder of the blood was disposed of in the way stated in the next paragraph.

A short distance from the circle was a colossal representation of Dhurramoolun, lying prone on his back, formed of the loose earth heaped up in high relief, and having a quartz crystal (*ngooyar*)

laid on his forehead. A little way further was another raised image, also lying on the back, but of smaller dimensions, with the *coolamin* containing human blood, already referred to, lying on his breast. This represented *Ghindaring*, a malevolent being whose body is red and resembles burning coals; he is said to have his abode in rocky places on the tops of mountains. There was another human figure lying near these, about life size, and formed in the same way. The surface of the ground on both sides of the track near these images was ornamented with the usual *yammunyanun* devices cut into the soil, mentioned by me in other publications.¹ Among these carvings may be mentioned a porcupine, a dog, the sun with rays, and the moon both in the crescent and at the full.

Scattered here and there around the circle and amongst the images and designs on the ground were a number of marked trees, on the bark of which were carved representations of the emu, the wombat, the opossum, the kangaroo, the "iguana," the "squirrel," a snake crawling up, and other figures. On a log, which was lying on the ground near by, was cut the figure of a turtle, representing a habit which that animal has of lying on a log on the bank of a water-hole. One of the trees had a narrow strip of bark cut off along its bole in a wavy line, extending from about twenty feet high to the ground, to represent a tree struck by lightning, such as one often sees in travelling through the bush. Another tree had an imitation of an eagle-hawk's nest, built in a fork of one of the branches, about twenty-five or thirty feet from the ground. My native informants told me that the figures of animals and other devices carved on the trees and on the ground were executed with pieces of hard wood on which a sharp edge had been formed. Close to the smaller circle and the raised images a fire was kept burning on top of a low heap of loose earth raked together for the purpose.

Gathering the Tribes.—Messengers were despatched to the head men of all the adjacent tribes who were expected to participate in the ceremonies. Each of these messengers carried the usual emblems of his mission, namely, a bullroarer, a belt, several "tails," or kilts, and his conduct on arrival at a strange camp was

¹ Journ. Anthop. Inst., xxv., 302 and 323.

practically the same as previously described by me in the initiation ceremonies of other tribes. The messenger remained with the tribe to which he had been sent until they were ready to accompany him to the appointed meeting place. On getting near the general camp, all the men painted their bodies with stripes and patches and coloured clays and the novices were painted red. On arriving in sight of the camp all their baggage was laid down, and the women and aged people remained there for the present. The men then formed into single file, each man having a small green bough in his right hand, and a bundle of spears in his left, the upper ends of which pointed outwards over his left shoulder.¹ The messenger was in the lead, or close to it, and carried the sacred bullroarer in his belt, wrapped carefully in a piece of the skin of some animal.

When the strangers reach the ring (*gooraboolan*) they enter it through the opening in the embankment and march round until they are all within it, and then call out the names of remarkable mountains, water-holes, and camping places in their country. They also shout out the names of the wattle trees several times. The local mob, and all the men who had arrived in previous contingents, are sitting round the ring, having assembled there when they heard the strangers approaching. They also now enter the circle, and jump about, and in turn call out the names of wattle trees, mountains, etc., in their several districts. Everyone then comes out of the circle, and the men of the newly arrived mob go and assist their women to put up their quarters on the side of the camp facing their own country. All the men then proceed along the path to the farther ring, the hosts being in the lead. They show the strangers Dhurramoolun and the other images, the marked trees, and everything on the sacred ground, at all of which the men give a shout in unison. They then all return along the path to the public ring, where they again call out principal water-holes, totems, etc., after which they disperse to their several camps.

Daily Performances at the Camp.—Some of the men and women go out hunting and fishing, and searching for roots in different directions every day, returning to the camp at various times,

according to their success in the field. Most of the men are back in the camp a few hours before sundown, and go through certain daily preliminary performances. The men of the local tribe gather up out of their camp and proceed to the large ring, carrying a small bough in one hand. The men of the other tribes follow them, and when all the men are in the ring they call out the names of remarkable places in their several districts. During this time the women are beating their hands on their rugs and singing. The men then come out of the ring and throw away their boughs and march away along the pathway to the farther ring, looking at all the imagery on the ground and on the trees. There are generally some of the "doctors," or "wizards," present, and these go into the ring and stand beside the stumps, bringing pieces of string (*birrawun*), quartz crystals (*ngooyar*), and other substances out of their mouths, from their navel, and from between their legs. All the men then return along the path to the public ring, in which they jump about and call out the names of remarkable places as before, after which they walk away to their camps. The bullroarer is sounded in the vicinity of the main encampment every day at dawn and at dusk, and during almost every fine evening a corroboree is danced by one of the tribes present.

Taking away the Novices.—When all the tribes who are expected have arrived, the old men meet adjacent to the camp, and fix the day on which the business of the meeting—the initiation ceremonies—shall commence. Shortly after nightfall, they proceed to the sacred ground and light pieces of dry bark at the fire burning there, and then come marching back towards the camp shouting and waving their firebrands in the air. They enter the public ring and dance round, the women beating time for them, after which they throw away the firesticks and call out the names of water-holes, etc., and then go away to their camps.

Early next morning the novices are brought into the ring and placed sitting down on the bank, their mothers and the other women being outside. One of the head men then enters the ring and sticks a spear into the ground near one side. He throws the spear out of his hand, and he may have to throw it two or three times before it sticks firmly into the ground. He now catches the spear in his right hand, and another man catches hold of his left, a third man catches the left hand of the second

¹ "The Burbung of the Wiradthuri Tribes," *Journ. Anthropol. Inst.*, xxv., 305.

man, and so on all round the ring, until the last man can catch the right hand of the man who holds the spear. The first man thereupon relinquishes his hold of the spear, which is a signal for all the men to let go each others' hands. An old man then goes round the ring and hits the ground with his *nulla nulla*, and all the men fall down. In a short time they rise again from the ground and withdraw to the side of the ring where the track enters it. The boys' heads are now bent down, and the women are covered with rugs, bushes or grass, some of the old men being deputed to watch them. As soon as this is done two men sound bullroarers (*minyawoak*) in close proximity, whilst the other men beat their weapons together, and the man who has been appointed guardian to the novice, usually his brother-in-law, now catches him by the arm and leads him away along the pathway. On reaching the farther ring the novices are shown the carvings on the turf and on the trees, the eagle-hawk's nest, the lightning tree, etc. They are next shown Dhurramoolun and Ghindaring, and lastly the blood-stained posts, with the white stones and string. The posts are then pulled out of the ground and burnt upon the fire.

The Watyoor Camp.—A short digression must now be made for the purpose of explaining how the women are released from the custody in which they were left when the novices were taken away. Shortly after the latter get out of sight the covering is removed from the women by the old men who have charge of them, and they are set at liberty. All hands then gather up their baggage and remove the camp to another locality, perhaps some miles distant, which was determined by the head men at the same time that they fixed the day for taking the boys away. On arriving at the new site the local mob are the first to erect their quarters, around which the visiting tribes take up their positions on the sides which are nearest their respective districts. Several old men, some belonging to each tribe, remain with the women at this new camp for the purpose of superintending the due performance of all the tribal regulations.

About a hundred yards from the main encampment—on the side towards that part of the hunting grounds into which the novices have been taken—the old women, and mothers of the boys, erect a gunyah, called the *watyoor*, composed of forked

saplings, rails and boughs. It is built in a straight line, and is open on the side facing the direction from which the novices will approach it, in the manner described later on. It is large enough to hold all the novices and their guardians, and has leaves strewn thickly on the floor for them to lie on. Near one end of this long gunyah all loose rubbish is cleared off the surface of the ground to make it fit for dancing on. Every morning the mothers of the novices, accompanied by the old women of all the tribes present, repair to the *watyoor*, and light one or more fires in the cleared space, around which they sit and sing songs which have reference to the novices. Every night they dance at these fires, from which they lift burning sticks and wave them in the air, in the direction in which they believe the boys to be camped with the headmen. These women are collectively known as *yanniva*, and the young women or children, or any of the men, are not permitted to go near them when assembled at the *watyoor*.

Ceremonies in the Bush.—We must now return to the novices at the sacred circle. When all the formalities have been carried out, the men and boys start away to the part of the district in which it has been decided to remain whilst carrying out the ceremonies in the bush. All the men who take part in the secret ceremonies, who are called *Kooringul*, have their bodies painted jet black, with powdered charcoal and grease. The novices walk with their guardians, their heads being inclined on their breasts, and when the camping place is reached, they are placed sitting down on leaves spread thickly on the ground, their backs being towards the men's quarters. Several days may be spent at this camp, or perhaps a fresh camping place is reached every night. In either case, various spectacular displays, representing animals, hunting scenes, and also songs and dances, take place every fine evening at the camp fires. The time spent at these camps in the bush generally occupies about a fortnight, being regulated by the weather and other considerations. Human ordure is occasionally given to the novices in addition to their daily food. They are not allowed to speak to anyone, and if they require anything they must make a sign to the guardian who has charge of them.

About the middle of this period, preparations are made for the extraction of one of the novice's upper incisor teeth. A small patch of ground is cleared of all loose rubbish a short distance from

the camp, and the guardians raise the novices on their shoulders and carry them thither. In this clear space, which is called the *bunnumbeal*, some men are seated, beating the ground in front of them with pieces of bark, shaped something like a cricket bat, and making a noise. The father or uncle licked or sucked the top of the novice's skull, for the purpose of making the tooth come out more easily. One man then bent down, and placed the boy sitting on his knee, another man standing beside him to keep the boy steady. The tooth extractor then stepped forward, and inserted his own lower teeth under one of the boy's upper incisors, and gave a strong steady pull, which perhaps brought out the tooth. If this failed, a small piece of wood, hardened in the fire, was used as a chisel, being placed against the tooth, and then a smart tap with a mallet on the other end completed the dental operation. The tooth was then taken out of the boy's mouth with the man's fingers, and held up to public view, which was the signal for a shout from all the men present. During these proceedings a bullroarer was sounded in the adjacent bush, just out of sight, and at the conclusion the boys were led back to their camp, and put sitting down with their hands over their mouths. They must swallow the blood which flows from the wounded gum. During their stay in the bush each boy has the hair of his head cut off, which is twisted into a coil, "like a fig of tobacco," as my native informants said. A male relative of the boy keeps this coil of hair for a long time.

In the course of a day or two after the extraction of the tooth, some men come from the *watyoor*, or women's camp, and approach the Koorungal's quarters, uttering a weird noise, something between a shout and a whistle. Each man carries a long, slender, bushy bough, holding one end of it in each hand, with the middle part bent over his head like a wreath. These men come right up to the camp and jump about in front of the boys, who are allowed to raise their eyes and look at them. The strangers then throw down their boughs and go a little way from the camp, where they enter into conversation with the head men of the Koorungal. They inquire how the initiation ceremonies are progressing, and arrange the date of the return of the novices to the *watyoor*, after which they take their departure and go back to the camp of the women, and inform them when the boys may be expected.

Early on the following morning the novices are placed standing in a row beside the camp with their eyes cast down upon the ground. The men then stoop down and scratch the loose leaves off the surface of the ground until an oval space has been cleared. Some of them then stand round on this cleared space, into which two men enter and commence swinging the bullroarers (*minyawoak*), and the boys are told to look at them. Some armed men now rush up to each of the novices and caution them against revealing what they have been taught during their sojourn in the bush. After this everything is packed up and the journey towards the *watyoor* camp commenced. On arriving at a water-hole, which had been decided upon by the head men at the same time that the position of the *watyoor* was determined, the Koorungal jump into the water, under the pretence of looking for turtles, but in reality for the purpose of washing off the charcoal powder with which their bodies were painted. The novices do not go into the water-hole, but stand on the bank watching the men, who lave handfuls of water towards them. When the men come out of the water-hole they paint their bodies all over with pipe-clay, and the novices are painted with stripes or daubs of white on the face, arms, and chest. The men and boys are dressed in their kilts and other regalia and the journey onwards towards the women's camp is then resumed.

Return of the Novices.—On the day which has been appointed for the return of the novices their mothers proceed to the *watyoor*, being painted with coloured clays. They wear headbands round their hair, in which are fastened various ornaments, such as the feet of the porcupine (*Echidna*), the teeth of animals, and the tail of the native dog hanging down behind. They are accompanied as usual by the other old women of the tribes present, and on this occasion several old men go with them to make the necessary arrangements for the reception of the novices. These old men take the yam-sticks of the mothers and insert them in the ground all along the open side of the *watyoor*, the top of each stick having a bunch of leaves tied to it, and also some article belonging to the owner attached to it, in order that each boy may recognise his mother's yam-stick.

All the necessary preparations having been made, a signal is given by the men, on which the Koorungal and neophytes make

their appearance marching in file, the latter being near the front. The women are dancing and jumping around a fire on the clear space near the *watyoor*, and when the contingent from the bush get near enough the women go a little way towards them, and throw small pieces of bark over the men's heads. These pieces of bark are prepared for the purpose, being about the size of a man's open hand. They are first slightly charred in the fire, and are then ornamented with a few stripes or daubs of pipe-clay. Several of these missiles are thrown by each woman, and are warded off by the men. The novices march right on into the *watyoor*, and each boy lies down on the leaves opposite his mother's yam-stick, their guardian's remaining in front of them. The mother's now go back to the main camp, which is perhaps 100 or 200 yards away. The men then throw green bushes on the fire, around which they gather until the old men consider that they have been sufficiently fumigated. After this the Koorungal go into the women's camp or into the single men's quarters, but the guardians remain with the novices who camp at the *watyoor* that night.

Next morning the guardians and novices leave the *watyoor* and go into the bush for some days, gaining their living by hunting. During the day the people at the main camp proceed to settle any tribal wrongs which may have been perpetrated since the last initiation gathering. A few of the men of each side throw spears and other weapons. Some of the women of one tribe engage in combat with women of another tribe, using their yam-sticks freely on their opponents. When their differences are satisfactorily disposed of in accordance with tribal custom, all the people seem to be again on the best of terms with each other.

In the course of a few days the novices are again brought back to a place near the women's camp, painted and wearing their full dress. Pieces of bark or rugs are spread upon the ground, on top of which each mother lays some food for her son. Two "dilly bags," containing leaves, are laid beside each boy's allowance of food, and the mothers and old women remain close by, painted and dressed as on the occasion of the return of the novices to the *watyoor*. When everything is ready the guardians bring the novices marching up, and on their arrival each boy

picks up one of the dilly bags and pulling the leaves out scatters them in the air. Then they each lift the other bags of leaves and scatter them in the same manner, after which they sit down and commence eating the food. The mothers then come forward and sit down beside their sons, and sing a kind of lamentation, because from this time onward the boys will not be permitted to stop at their mother's camp, but must remain with the men. At the conclusion of their repast the novices are taken into a camp provided for them near that of the single men, and the mothers return to their own quarters.

The ceremonies being now at an end, all the strange tribes get ready for their departure to their respective countries, and in the course of a few days most of them are on their way homewards. Each tribe take care of their own novices, who are still kept under the control of their guardians after their return to their own country. They now go out hunting with the men during the day, and are brought a little nearer the camp every night, until they are at last brought right into the single men's quarters. The novices are now called *Narramang*, and rank as men of the tribe. They must, however, abstain from eating certain animals and other kinds of food which have been enumerated to them by the chief men of their tribe.

Owing to the novices having to keep their heads bent down, and being otherwise prevented from seeing many parts of the ceremonies it becomes necessary that they should attend at least one more Burbung before they can become thoroughly acquainted with the different parts of the ceremonial. At the next gathering of the tribes for initiation purposes, the neophytes who have passed through the ordeal described in this article will be allowed to assist in preparing the sacred ground, and be present at the arrival of the tribes, and also to attend all the private meetings of the men. They will likewise be permitted to join the Koorungal, and see everything that is done at the secret camps in the bush and at the *watyoor*.

On the north the Darkinung are bounded by the Wattung and other tribes scattered over the country on the other side of the Hunter River; on the west they are joined by the great Wiradjuri community, and their limits on the south are identical with the boundary of the people occupying the south-east coastal

district of New South Wales. The south-east corner of the *taorai* of the Kamilaroi Tribes touched the north-west corner of the Darkinung territory about Jerry's Plains. On carefully studying the initiatory rites of the tribes referred to, as described by me elsewhere, traces of all their ceremonies are distinguishable in the Burbung of the Darkinung tribes. This is only what I should expect to find among a people surrounded by powerful communities, speaking different languages, and having initiation ceremonies more or less divergent.