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JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS
OF
The Victoria Institute,
OR,
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

EDITED BY THE HONORARY SECRETARY,
CAPTAIN F. W. H. PETRIE, F.G.S., &c.

VOL. XXX.



LONDON :

(Published by the Institute, 8, Adelphi Terrace, Charing Cross, W.C.)

DAVID NUTT, 270, STRAND.

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1898.

ORDINARY MEETING.*

THE VEN. ARCHDEACON R. THORNTON, D.D., VICE-PRESIDENT,
IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed, and

The following paper was then read by the author :—

PROBLEMS OF ABORIGINAL ART IN AUSTRALIA.

By the Right Rev. S. THORNTON, D.D., Bishop of Ballarat.

I TENDERED a paper on another subject; but, by request, submit one on the topic announced. In doing so, I disclaim personal credit for any interesting products of research it may contain. I have often held converse with Aborigines in Australia, during a residence there of twenty years, but have never myself seen any of the rock-paintings or sculptures (some of them to be found in my own diocese) which present the special problems I am to introduce to you this afternoon. In doing this I am largely indebted to a lucid and copious address given at Brisbane in 1895, before the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science, by the President of its Ethnological and Anthropological Section, Thomas Worsnop, Esq., Town Clerk of Adelaide, South Australia. Expressions in a letter received by me from that gentleman warrant the belief that he will be gratified, rather than aggrieved, by my making free use of the materials collected by him, in drawing attention to the problems presented

* 8th of 32nd Session.

by the antiquities (if I may call them so) of the Australian continent, and awakening interest in the history, condition, and claims of its aboriginal population. Again, it is only right to mention that all labourers in this field cannot help being large debtors to R. H. Mathews, Esq., of New South Wales, medallist of the Royal Society of that colony, who has been indefatigable in its investigation.

So extraordinary is the ignorance still prevailing among educated English people about distant parts of the empire, that it hardly startled me to encounter the other day a gentleman who was unaware that any Aborigines at all remained in Australia; while it is not uncommon to meet with the entirely gratuitous idea that the Australians belong to a different order or species of humanity from ourselves, incapable of evangelisation or civilisation.

How many Aborigines remain it is impossible to say with confidence, the census enumerator not finding it convenient to pay his calls in the far interior of the Island Continent. That a process of diminution has been going on amongst them for a long time—as among the Maoris of New Zealand—accelerated where they have come into contact or conflict with white men, seems believed by all who have acquainted themselves with the subject. It is not difficult to conjecture some of the causes of this decay, but impossible to speak plainly of them. The abominations of heathenism do not bear discussion; but infanticide, pre-natal as well as post-natal, cannibalism, blood revenge, the killing of a man at every death (which prevails in some parts of the country), and the cruel treatment and excessive labour of the women among the heathen blacks, in addition to the precariousness of the means of life in Mid-Australia, would account in measure for the decrease referred to, which is retarded, if not stopped, by the influence of really Christian civilisation. It stands to reason that such decrease, while going forward, would be accompanied by deterioration in the qualities and capacities of the race itself. And a non-progressive race always tends to wither away. Still, the diminution does not seem to have gone on very rapidly. It may be mentioned that twins among the blacks, and even triplets, are common, which leaves some margin for infanticide. And the mutual battles between tribes do not appear to have been largely destructive of human life.

Wallace says the blacks “must have exceeded 150,000 when Australia was first settled by Europeans.” He estimates

them in 1879 (I know not on what grounds) at between 70,000 and 80,000: and writes, "it is not improbable that the degraded Australian will long outlast the much higher Maori or Tahitian." It is certainly noticeable that comparative survival of races does not bear direct proportion to nobleness of race, and is compatible with a process of extinction in the survivors. The Red man in America wiped out the far superior Toltecan, and then dwindled, himself: and the idea that the present Aborigines of Australia have superseded some more artistic people seems, at any rate, not untenable (though I do not adopt it); is confirmed, as some think, by the remains of by-gone art we are to consider presently; and not discouraged by the fact that, from time to time, fresh types of Aborigines are met with, such as the fair-skinned type, encountered by Grey in the N.W., and the stout and jovial examples found near the McDonnell Ranges by the recent Horn Expedition to Central Australia.

But the question remains a problem to be solved, and is one of the most interesting suggested by the Art remains we are to consider.

Some of the products of aboriginal art, indeed, do not in themselves suggest any profound problems. The black of to-day, in common with other savages, is not only strongly mimetic, but has his own sense of beauty in form or colour, and craves to give it expression in the decoration of his person, his weapons, and his utensils. He paints circles round his eyes; scars, with sharp shells, patterns on his back and shoulders: marks his face and body for festive occasions in red and white geometric lines; adorns his head with grass or cockatoo feathers, his forehead with bandeaux, his nose with bones thrust through the septum, his neck with strings of beads or teeth, and his legs with anklets of green leaves. His long, narrow crescent-shaped shield, his waddy, his throwing-stick, and even his boomerang exhibit the bar, the zig-zag, the herring-bone, the lozenge, the chevron, the St. Andrew's Cross (never the Latin or Greek cross), the circlet, and the oval. Strange to say, he never employs flowers or shells as ornaments, while of precious stones or metals he knows nothing. His love for removing the central front tooth may be dictated by a desire for symmetrical effect, or else for some conspicuous badge of initiation into certain religious rites.

Of utensils the black uses few, but his nets are beautifully made, and his grass baskets are not only grace-

ful in shape, but ornamented by lines of vari-coloured material.

His special delight, however, is in pictures; in painting or carving on trees, wood, bark, leaves, rock, hard clay, or the surface of birds' eggs; not, singularly enough, on bone. The delight with which the Aborigines at our mission stations adorn their huts with plain or coloured prints might be thought a result of civilisation; but a corresponding taste is unmistakeable in the uncivilised Australian. He smokes sheets of bark, and then draws on them with his thumb-nail, but with singular accuracy and spirit, the totem of his tribe, the forms of vegetation, turtles, birds, fishes, reptiles, marsupials, and men. Sometimes the representations are intentionally grotesque. Conventional types are adopted on his "message sticks" for trees, lakes, and rivers; and such devices as throwing up objects into relief by dark or white back-grounds, or concentric surrounding lines, evidence the true artistic spirit, while, problematically enough, all tangential lines are carefully avoided. He manufactures paints—red, white, and black—out of burnt earth, coloured tubers, pipe-clay, plumbago, and charcoal (not—except rarely, and in drawings commonly thought to be ancient—blue and yellow), and he gives his colours metallic lustre and permanence by mixing bird- or fish-oil or fat with them. His tool for carving is the opossum tooth, or flint. His circles are wonderfully true; his geometrical patterns sometimes beautiful, especially on (seemingly) ancient drawings, in which opportunities are cleverly availed of, such as a hole in the rock to draw a snake issuing, or an arm stretched out, from it. Above all, there is nothing deliberately indecent or revolting, in which he contrasts nobly with the artists of cleverer and more cultured races. Sometimes he forms patterns or figures on the flats by clearing grass away; sometimes digs them out in the sun-baked soil, or removes a hard and rough outside of rock to get a better surface, or moulds effigies of snakes—like the serpentine tumuli in Ohio or Missouri—in turfy ground.

The number of aboriginal carvings and paintings in different parts of Australia is simply prodigious. None, however, have been found by miners in the drift. Beneath the surface of the earth no remains of art have as yet, to my knowledge, been discovered.

The objects we have so far referred to present, as I have said, for the most part, no particular problems for solution.

They only evidence the possession of the artistic faculty in the race, in common with other untutored races; and, to that extent, the baselessness of the idea that the Australian is essentially different from the rest of mankind. His skull is long, small, and poorly-shaped, and his intellectual capacity low; but generic or specific "differentia" there is none: "God hath made of *one blood* all the nations of the earth." The corpuscles in that of the Australian are absolutely indistinguishable from those of blood flowing in the veins of Mr. Gladstone or Mr. Balfour. There is nothing in the Australian to militate against the idea of unity in the origin of mankind.

The art which hitherto has engaged our notice is, no doubt, inferior to that displayed by the Maori, the Fijian, or the Polynesian. But a somewhat different class of aboriginal work will now occupy our attention.

Lieutenant Grey (now the octogenarian Sir George) discovered, in 1841, in N.W. Australian caves, coloured drawings of a very remarkable kind; and many more have since been met with, presenting features of a most *piquant*, and distinctly "problematic," character. Mr. Worsnop has collected descriptions of many of these, and I shall have the honour of submitting representations of some of them; familiar, probably, to some present, but possibly fresh to not a few, and of unquestionable and peculiar interest.

In a temple-like cave of sandstone, in an elevated and romantic situation, and approached by a rough staircase of scattered rock some 5 feet in height;—a cave 35 feet wide at the entrance, 16 feet deep, and 8 feet high in front, roofed by a solid slab some 9 feet thick, rapidly inclined towards the back of the cave, where the height was some 5 feet, Grey found, painted imposingly inside the sloping roof, the first figure I show [Fig. 1]; the rock about it blackened, and the figure itself a vivid red and white, so that it seemed to lean out from the rock. Its head was encircled by red rays, inside which came a brilliant red stripe, crossed by lines of white, and bordered by a deeper red. The face was vivid white, the eyes black, but surrounded by red and yellow lines; the body was outlined in red, marked with red stripes and bars. This awe-inspiring figure was seemingly being contemplated [Fig. 2] by four other figures on the left-hand wall, which I also show; vividly coloured upon white ground, the four heads wearing a turban-like head-dress (unlike any now worn by Aborigines) of a bright blue



FIG. 1.
Red, eyes yellow.



FIG. 2.
Figures red.
Shading—horizontal = blue.
Perpendicular = red.
Stippled = yellow.

colour, and one figure wearing a necklace. Two had a dress with red stripes and bars, and one a waistband. Each face had a distinct expression: all were somewhat attractive: none of the faces had mouths. The colours were apparently indelible.

The next most remarkable drawing in the cave was a large *ancile*, or elliptic shield; the outside line deep blue, the body yellow, dotted over with red lines or spots, crossed by two lines of blue. On it was a kangaroo; two spear heads pointing in opposite directions; and two black balls.

A third sketch was of a man carrying a kangaroo.

There were some 50 other drawings of men, kangaroos, &c., in this cave, but altogether inferior in merit, and surmised to be subsequent additions; but at the back of the cave was a hand and arm painted black on white, of most striking appearance; while on the ceiling at the end, at the height where a sitter's head would have touched it, was a greasy mark, as though a human head of hair had habitually rubbed against it.

Here assuredly are "problems." What did the principal figures portrayed in this cave represent?

The sun-like glory round the head [Fig. 1] surely

suggests the supernatural, or Divinity. The markings on the body resemble nothing so much as Polynesian cloth, never worn by the Australian Aborigines of our time; to whom, again, blue and yellow pigments seem almost, if not quite, unknown. What, then, may be inferred from the absence of a mouth in all the figures? It is said to be sometimes omitted in modern aboriginal face-pictures; but may not that be a traditional convention? The mouth is the most conspicuous feature in the Aboriginal; it is large, thick-lipped, and sensual—a mere gobbling machine. Have we here the suggestion of an attribute of divinity—of a being conspicuously possessed of the more spiritual faculties of sight and smell, but superior to the need of food and drink?

Another solution of the problem has been suggested. Justin Martyr, *Apologia*, i, § 55, says: "The human form differs from the brutal in its uprightness and extended hands, and in the nose-protuberance from between the eyes, through which the creature breathes": and he adds, "it exhibits nothing else than the shape of the cross." If he means that the head, trunk and arms of man reveal the figure of the Roman instrument of torture, one is reminded of the wiseacre who traced Providential goodness in the arrangement that rivers flowed near great towns. If the philosophic Justin cannot be suspected of falling into this trap—and I think better of him, though Tertullian (*Ad. Nat.*, i, 12) seems to quote him in that sense—one may conclude that he indicated the cross made by the intersection of the nose and eyes of man; and *this would be emphasised by disregarding the mouth*. May it be supposed, then, that we have in these mouthless faces a *Christian* symbol? But, if so, why is the Latin or Greek Cross itself—and even the Tau—nowhere discoverable in the caves?

A third solution suggested is that we have here the half-veiled face of Oriental women. It is hard either to controvert, or to accept, this idea.

Blue—the colour of the sky and ocean—may well be a hue in the *nimbus* round a celestial head. Yellow, again, is the colour of the golden sunlight; while red, blue, and yellow, with white as their combination, are the emblematic colours of religion all the world over, their symbolism being abundantly employed in Holy Scripture.

Are not these likely to have been Sacred figures? May we trace here a representation of *Baiamé*—the Creator, in Australian theology—presented by this effort of sacred art

to worshippers frequenting the temple-cave, attended by *wundas*, or ministering spirits? May the cloth-robe suggest that these drawings—occurring in a part of the continent where it is thought its first colonists entered Australia from Asia—were executed at a very early time, before the manufacture and use of fibre-cloth (retained by their fellow-emigrants who went eastward to the islands) were forgotten by the degenerate Australians? And may the grease-mark on the ceiling show that in the *adytum* of this Cave-Temple a *chorargie—chirurgien*, medicine man, or priest—was wont officially to sit and face the worshippers?

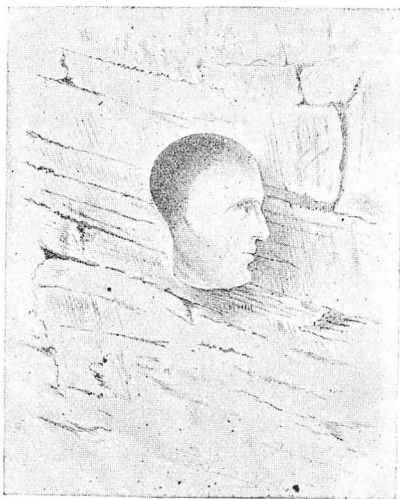


FIG. 3.

The whole case is a “problem,” and conjecture one’s sole resource. It would be interesting to know for certain what the Aborigines of to-day say and think of these caves; but testimony on the point is conflicting. Some of them are said to repudiate all knowledge of the origin of the drawings: they were done “murry murry (that is, very very) many moons (ages) ago”; and they superstitiously shun the caves as fetish-places—“too much dibble dibble.” Others of them are said to camp in the caves without hesitation, and to claim the drawings as done by their fathers. But it is plain that the religious associations and reverence connected with them and with their symbolism have decayed. It seems to charac-

terise the religious observances of the blacks, that they are a decayed mechanical survival of forms that must once have had meaning and reality.

As for the *ancile*, or elliptic shield, one can make nothing of it. Grey fancied it was some charm connected with the finding of game; but such an explanation sorely needs explaining.

Another cave introduced a fresh problem. [Fig. 3.] Fronting it, high up on the vertical face of a cliff, and unreachably without mechanical aid, had been carved out of the solid stone a human head in profile, which I show. It was 2 feet long and 16 inches across, and $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick; and I leave my hearers to say whether it is not a striking and distinguished face. It is absolutely different from the heads of modern Aborigines. The worn edges of the cameo, where it joined the rock-surface, seemed to mark a long interval since it was carved: the difficulty of carving it where it stood must have been immense—unless, indeed, the rock-face had been near the ground at the time, and the ground had worn away since—which, again, would probably imply antiquity.

What a problem this Caucasian face presents! Is it that of some stranger from Europe long ago—perhaps before the Portuguese or Spanish visitors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? In all probability European ships traversed the Pacific before the days of Balboa; for Greek columns are found in an island of the South Sea: and the prevalence of small-pox among the Australians when we first settled there is said—with what truth I must leave pathologists to decide—to postulate previous residence of Europeans amongst them. There is nothing, however, to identify the head before us with any particular time or country. It presents a problem gruesomely suggestive. The severed head has been carved on the rock, probably from a sense of its beauty: the body was in the hands of cannibals, and may have been “carved” after a more tragic fashion!

In another cave, elevated several feet above the surrounding ground, was a painting [Fig. 4] 10 feet 6 inches

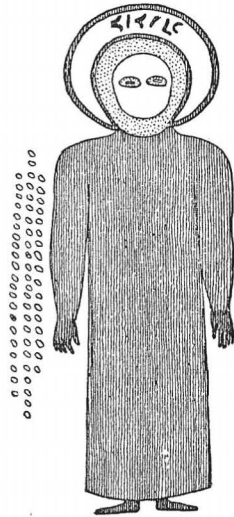


FIG. 4.

Stippled circle and eyes
= yellow.

in height, of a man clothed to the wrists and ankles with a red garment, in a way unknown among modern aboriginals. The head was encircled with what seemed like bandages—red, yellow and white—and the eyes were the only features represented. On the highest tier of bandages was an inscription, in red lines: on each side of the cave were figures of turtles and gigantic snakes. On the right of the figure were depicted 62 small o's, or rings.

What meaneth this? One anxiously studies the inscription, but experts can make nothing of it. The characters perhaps resemble Thibetan more than any other. Is it a clumsy tracing of some Thibetan title? Have we here a standing Buddh—or a Buddhist bonze,—an evidence that Buddhistic teaching was brought over from Asia long ago? Nothing else has been found, so far, to confirm the speculation. Do the 62 little o's represent the limited company of adherents or converts obtained? One finds them employed as tattoo marks on the shoulders of the blacks. Acquaintance, somewhere, with races of men wearing turbans seems implied, in the portrayal by the Aborigines of such a figure: but whether as a reminiscence of days before they colonised Australia, or through visitors from the Asiatic continent or islands, who shall say?

Crowds of drawings are found in the cliffs and in the caves of the Kimberley district, West Australia, many of them artistically filled in and shaded, the mouths in the faces, alone, being badly done. May that feature have been added by a later hand? A figure resembling a monkey is noticeable, as a link of connection of some kind with Asia;—the animal is unknown in Australia.

On, or near, the Alligator River are forty caves in a radius of 100 miles, containing immense numbers of drawings and hieroglyphics, pictures of canoes and of human skeletons (perhaps the skeleton is the Aboriginal symbol for man in his higher condition, after death, for in their solemn dances they trace the skeleton on their persons); many of the human figures have all the features; some have European features and clothing. One man has his arms crossed over his breast. On the Darwin River, excellent drawings are found on the trees: on the overland track between Queensland and Port Darwin is drawn a full-length black pursuing two little white men, whose hair stands on end with fear; a third lies speared on the ground: these drawings may well be modern. In the McDonnell ranges, however, are numerous paintings in yellow,

red, and black, which the old men of the place emphatically declare had meanings once, long lost to later generations.

Similar drawings in vast numbers are found in the north-east and centre of Australia. In one case was found a shield with the Roman V and I painted on it: in another the picture of a man with a broad tail: in another a colossal frog, jumping.

At Buckland's tableland, Central Queensland, on the banks of the Nardoo Creek, is a high cliff on the face of which, under a projecting ledge of rock, and 21 feet at bottom from the highest foothold, is a magnificent representation some 70 feet across, covering 500 square feet, in red, blue, white and yellow, of a lake of sulphurous fire, out of which are stretched hundreds of dusky arms, life-size, in every conceivable position, the muscles knotted, and the hands grasping convulsively, or pointing heavenwards.

They are faithful in an anatomical point of view: every joint is seen, and looks alive: the hands are like those of the blacks, and some of the fingers are bent back, as the blacks can bend them. The natives of to-day have a horror of this place, and say neither their fathers nor they know anything of the origin of the picture. Does it represent a volcanic eruption, such as long ago may have occurred in Australia; or was it suggested by teachings about Hell?

An immense number of representations of the human hand are found: many are red in colour—the red hand, I believe, being found all over India and other countries, as well as in the scutcheon of our baronets! Frequently they seem impressions of hands dipped in pigment: but in many cases the hand is done in splash-work, pigment having been squirted over it, leaving a blank pattern behind. This would account for the hand being mostly the left, and pointing upwards, very seldom downwards,—as that would be the most natural and convenient method in doing the work. The hands are found on almost inaccessible cliffs.

One group inside a small cave appears to record a combat, or hand-hunting expedition. It would seem to read "there were four boomerangs (fighters): we cut off six pairs of hands." Another picture shows four red hearts—wonderfully well outlined—pierced by black spears.

I now exhibit some most extraordinary paintings in caves and recesses on the Regent's River, which I cannot possibly explain. They are in red, black, brown, yellow, white, and pale blue; and in some cases have manifestly been used on

palimpsest principles; a more recent drawing surmounting an older one.

In the first [Fig. 5] I direct attention to the extraordinary decapitated figures, with a man in the attitude of adoration behind them. Have we human sacrifice here? Also to the aquiline character of the nose—quite different from the

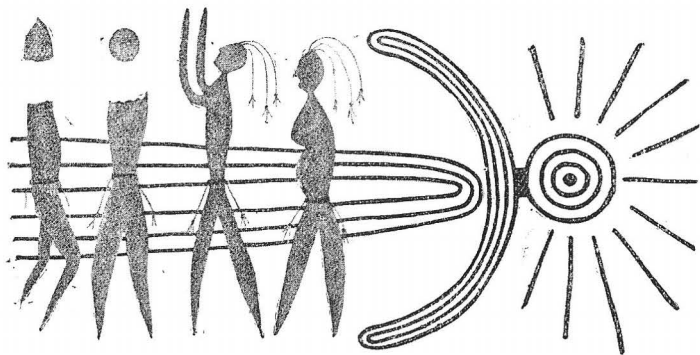


FIG. 5.

existing type; to the very peculiar tasselled head-dress and girdles—quite unknown among present-day natives; and to the tapering limbs of the figures, which end in points. The transverse form looks like a deity—the Sun, perhaps—and resembles a Polynesian idol.

The next shows two figures painted over a huge shark [Fig. 6] or marine creature. The figures are unlike current

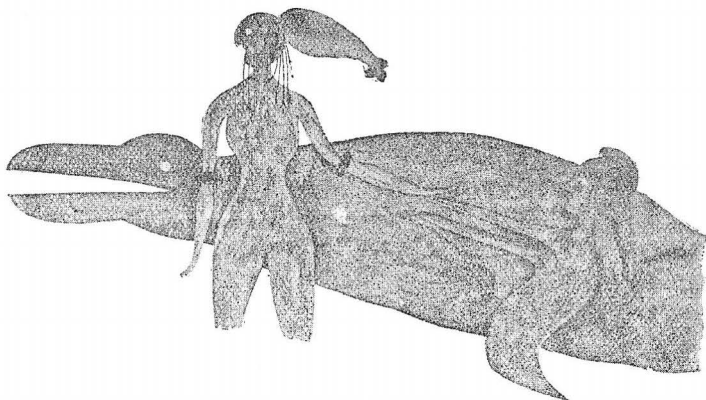


FIG. 6.

types, in face and head-dress, the latter being most peculiar—like an elongated bladder, curved, and ending in a trefoil. The lower figure wears a Phrygian cap, to which this strange head-dress is attached. The limbs taper in an extraordinary way. The tassels reappear, in abundance, on the larger figure.

A very remarkable cave-drawing has been figured by Westall, and can be seen at the Colonial Institute library. It represents a procession of 32 men and women with a kangaroo at their head. Most of the figures are draped to the ankles; and two, much larger than the rest, brandish a hilted sword, and a long staff, respectively. It was found at Memory Cove, South Australia.

The next picture shown is puzzling indeed [Fig. 7].



FIG. 7.

Over and across the figures of a snake and an old-man kangaroo have been drawn (as shown) five quite abnormal human figures, with the strange tapering extremities (sometimes ending in lumps), the tassels, and the bladder-like head-dress; except in one case, where a countenance somewhat like that of an ancient Assyrian is surmounted by a turreted hat, reminding one of the tablets of Chaldea and Assyria. A learned friend writes: "The figures are not Assyrian or Egyptian, nor do they seem to be Indian. They are so unique I have never seen anything like them before."

Over this drawing and on the left of it are strange hieroglyphic marks, hitherto undeciphered, or at least uninterpreted.

The next picture is still stranger. [Fig. 8.] Upon, and

encased by, a huge bladder-like form reminding one of a cuttle fish, but with glory round its head, stands an armless and featureless human figure, in shape apparently female, with tassels and head-dress. Protuberances from the bladder-like case bear a mask and a snake's head on two extremities, with tassels here and there. The whole has a hideous and "nightmare" appearance. It is what an Eton boy might listlessly draw on his blotting-paper at an examination, when he could not do the questions. Was this

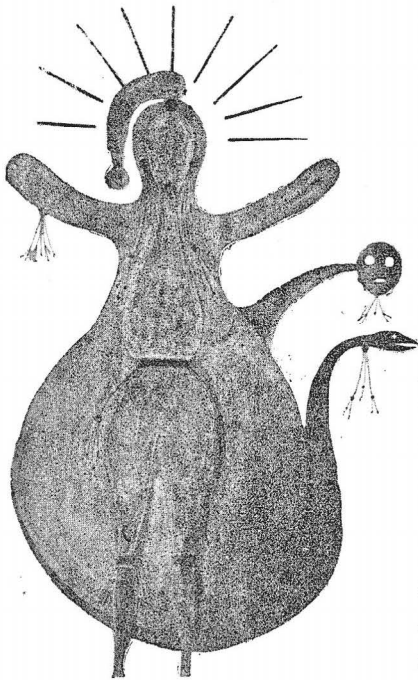


FIG. 8.

figure done by children,—or in some grotesque, wild mood, as a fantastic, unmeaning thing?

The next picture is to me very *piquant* indeed. [Fig. 9.] On a hard, smooth-faced cliff, 45 feet high, and about 15 feet above the bank of a creek 15 or 20 feet deep—so that access to the bottom of the carving is impossible without a ladder—are cut five vertical grooves, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter and $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches deep. On the right are two disjointed grooves. Underneath the five grooves are five round cavities; between them are cut arrows (the arrow, be it remembered, being unused by the Aborigines), notches, and ten well-executed representations of the *Jewish seven-branched*

candlestick! Of the problem here presented I offer no solution: but I saw lately what certainly awoke my special curiosity in connexion with it, viz., that in the hitherto unexplored interior of Vancouver Island, Mr. F. W. Laing, F.R.G.S., had found cut on the face of a giant rock, in the great Central Lake, some strange markings: "five parallel lines resembling a musical staff," and beside them "a seven-branched Candlestick!" The Smithsonian Institute is in-

vestigating this discovery; and one awaits with interest the conclusions that may be reached about it.

Once more [Fig. 10, next page] I submit a representation of a diaper pattern of singular beauty—red on a white ground—covering the interior of a cave at Ooraminna, on the overland telegraph track from Port Darwin to Adelaide. The diaper covers a wall-face 12 feet high by 16 wide: and access can only be obtained to the cave by passing behind a curtain of falling water. At the bottom appear two medallions, of singular and symmetrical form.

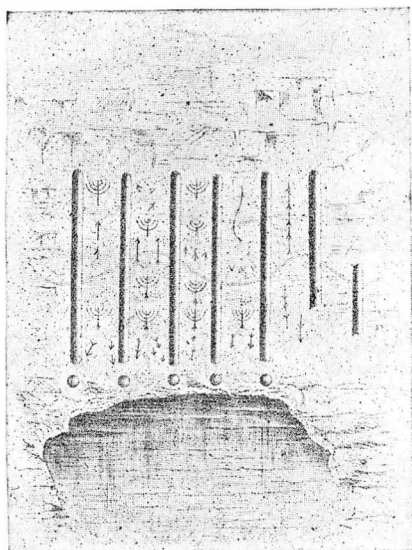


FIG. 9.

Last September I was in Ireland, a fellow-guest with the late Archbishop of Canterbury, in whose company I visited the "seven churches" at Glendalough. It certainly constitutes a "problem," that we should have found, covering the entire face of an Irish Bishop's tomb supposed to be of the sixth century, the precise pattern which I here show as decorating a cave in Mid-Australia! I drew the Archbishop's attention to the correspondence, which he admitted to be unmistakeable, and in a high degree remarkable and interesting.

I have now submitted to you enough examples, I hope, of Aboriginal Australian pictorial art to justify my view, that it presents problems of much interest and difficulty. In other kinds of art, the Aborigines of Australia offer little to challenge attention. For music they use rude trumpets of long, hollow bamboo; wooden cymbals; drums of rolled-out opossum skins; and a *sistrum*, consisting of shells with the apices ground off, strung together on fibre, looped up to the

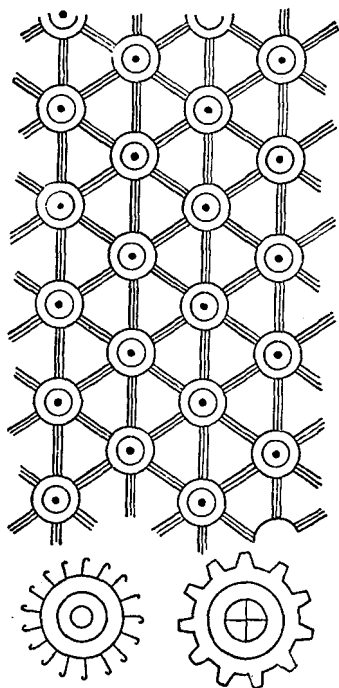


FIG. 10.

vertebra of a dog. By this handle it is held and shaken, and produces a melodious jingle. But the music of the uncivilised blacks, if plaintive, is monotonous, and hardly interesting. When taught better music they delight in singing it; and some of the Christian blacks have been trained to play, and even teach, the harmonium.

Play-acting is not unknown among the blacks as a charm against visits of ghosts: and their dances are not without an artistic element of their own.

But now, what can be said by way of inference from the facts before us? It would be unscientific, indeed, to dogmatise on the subject. On the question of the late or early date of the paintings and carvings opinion is not a little divided.

One thing emerges, I think: it is a conclusion also drawn by Mr. Fraser in his paper read before this Institute on the observances of the "Bora," or ceremonial induction of a youth into the privileges of manhood among the Australians, as compared with similar observances among certain African tribes: namely, that the former are only a branch of the one great human family, and not an isolated and independent genus or species of "humans." As I have said before, there is nothing in the essential qualities or faculties of the

Australians differentiating them from other races of men, or in itself opposed to a belief in the descent of all from a single stock, or pair. There is much to point to the conclusion that, though long resident in the Island Continent, its Aborigines came over from Asia—probably from India *via* Java and Timor and New Guinea—being a part of the eastern branch of the great Cushite race, of which a western section passed into Africa from its cradle north of the Persian Gulf. It also seems probable that the race has degenerated from more cultured days to its present inferior condition. All these conclusions are in harmony with the indications of Scripture. We will briefly examine them—omitting the first (the identity of the Australian in ultimate origin with other peoples), on which enough has been already said.

The affinity of the Australian to the Dravidian peoples in Central India and the Deccan—originally Cushite—is inferred from a certain correspondence in features, language, and weapons. The boomerang, for instance, is known to the Dravidian tribes of India, as it was to the ancient Egyptians (and perhaps, also, as the “Cateia” of the Latin poets, to the Teutons). In language a connection is unmistakeable. The pronouns I, thou, he, we, you are the same in Australian as in the Dravidian tongues of the Madras Presidency. (One is familiar with the scorn with which Max Müller treats seeming coincidences in words of the same meaning in languages of different families: but it is singular almost to laughableness that the Australian *cooe* for “here” should be so like the Italian *qui* and the Persian *koo*; *gin* for “woman” so like the Greek *γυνή*: *nāo* for “ship” or “boat” so like *ναῦς*—the Australian has no *s*; *kalia* for a “beautiful” woman so like *καλή*: “writing” or “mark,” *kalama*; *giber gunyah*, a “rock shelter” or “covering,” almost pure Arabic for the same; and may I add the *corroboree* of wild religious dancers, so like “Corybantes”? Such curious examples might be multiplied.)

But the separation from the parent stem must have taken place early, or the Australians must have strangely lost what their kindred of the same stock possess. The *s*, *f*, *x*, and *z*, for instance, are unknown to them: so are numerals above 3,—or at any rate 4: so are the bow and arrow, pottery, tillage, the custom of buying and selling, or even barter, and navigation of the seas. Moreover, the resemblances they present to their kindred in other parts seem to be not specific resemblances to any particular tribes—only

general, in characteristics shared at an early stage of their common history; which points to identity of original race, but in the distant past.

The antiquity of their arrival in the land may be inferred from various circumstantial evidences, in default of all records and traditions: such as the complicated diversity of their tribal vocabularies; and the length of time required for the whole continent to have been overrun by them, and partitioned into *dowdai's*, or *taorai's*, i.e. tribal districts. Strangely enough, they call Australia "the Little Country," *Kei Dowdai*, and New Guinea *Murry Dowdai*, or "the Great Country," a term suggestive of a time when they reached the former from the mountainous islands north of it, and saw the prevailing flatness, before they learned the scale, of Australia.

The absence of the slave institution amongst them favours their antiquity: and it has been inferred also from the vast scale of quarries from which they have hewn from generation to generation certain small stones they use for pounding *nardoo*; from the size of trees growing above their so-called "ovens,"—full of bones, stone-axes, and relics of human food; and from the enormous heaps of broken shells in their favourite places for consuming, at particular times, certain kinds of shell-fish,—underlying, in some cases, the silt of river-beds.

The fact of the immigration itself seems to point to a time when either navigation of the open sea was not unknown to them, or very different geological conditions made crossing Torres' Strait (perhaps on rafts) much easier than to-day.

The great antiquity of any of the drawings has, no doubt, been challenged, and it is hard to establish it with any confidence: but the above considerations seem to render it probable, in the case of some of them. It is true that in some places—perhaps owing to the character of the local rock-surface—they are perishing rather rapidly, which may imply that they cannot have existed long: but generally the case seems otherwise; and marks *known* to be many years old seem as fresh now as if made yesterday. The yellow and blue in some of the best drawings appear to favour the idea of antiquity, pigments of those colours being little, if at all, known to the modern black.

The degeneration of the artistic and other capacities of the race—as notably among the races of India—seems indicated

by the inferior art of the more modern drawings, and the absence of a lofty or religious *motif* in them. The originator of the throwing-stick—peculiar, I think, to Australia—must have been highly ingenious. Some wise and sagacious mind in the past must have instituted those most peculiar caste customs among the Australians which have the effect of shifting aristocracy by degrees from one family to another, and preventing the growth of a hereditary dominant class: as well as the salutary interdiction of marriage between persons doubly related to each other. And it seems significant of some religious traditions coming down from a bygone time of higher religious civilization, that observances prevail bearing a strong resemblance to those alluded to or prescribed in Genesis xxiv, 9; Deuteronomy xxiii, 12, 13, and Leviticus xii, xv.

The singular custom of circumcision exists in several tribes. Surely it must have been inherited from some other time and country! Strange to say, the habit of prayer to a Deity seems to have died out amongst them.

Happily, the true religious sentiment, however dormant, can be re-awakened in their case. The pollutions of savagery are not speedily effaced in a people: but I speak of what I know when I say that the Australian Aboriginal can apprehend and embrace the Christian Gospel, and that, when embraced indeed, it can transform his life. The Victorian Government, though rigidly non-religious, encourages religious ministrations in the governmental Black stations, on the ground of the potent and salutary influence of religion upon the conduct of the Aborigines.

I owe this audience an apology for some discursiveness in dealing with my topic. And I pray it to remember, that I only profess to bring forward in this Paper some of the problems suggested by the art of the Australian Aborigines; not to be competent to solve them. Doubtless there are those among the ladies and gentlemen I have had the honour to address infinitely better qualified than myself to undertake the task. I shall feel thankful if I may hope that my Paper will have excited in their minds some increased interest in a subject with which few educated persons in this country seem to have much acquaintance at present.

The CHAIRMAN (The Ven. ARCHDEACON THORNTON, D.D.)—I am sure I may return the thanks of the meeting to the Bishop of Ballarat for the extremely interesting subject which he has disclosed to us. Perhaps someone will begin the discussion upon it.

Rev. W. S. LACH-SZYRMA, M.A.—I think the suggestion as to these ancient people having come over from Asia is very interesting. To my mind Mrs. Langton Parker, in her work on *Legendary Lore*, seems to throw light on the theory as to Australians being similar to Europeans—of the later Stone Age—and a good many ancient legends and traditions seem to be somewhat similar to those found in Europe, which I believe really existed in the early periods—perhaps in this island in the Dolmen period—probably some thousands of years ago. Some of the legends of the Folklore of Europe represent that sort of transition or mixture of men and animals which is certainly very striking in these Australian tales.

Mr. D. HOWARD, D.L., F.C.S., &c.—This is one of those papers which are exceedingly interesting from a point of view which it is no novelty, perhaps, to remark on; but which needs to be kept in mind now as much as ever; that is, the necessity for suspense of judgment. Not long ago, certainly in my early days, it was said that the aborigines of Australia had been cut off from the rest of mankind for unlimited periods. Now we cannot help feeling that the evidence is all the other way. The fact that there are no traces of man in the drift—nothing corresponding with the discovery of human implements in the drift of many caves in Europe, points to these people being recent rather than ancient. Certainly what one sees of them helps to point to the fact that they belong to the descending scale rather than the ascending, and so far from indicating what we came from them, on the contrary, indicate the horrible *terminus ad quem* to which the human race may come.

Mr. L. THRUPP.—I spent many years in Australia, and have turned my attention to some of the subjects alluded to, and I desire to express my agreement with the last speaker—that the Australian is a degenerate race. It has gone down in the scale instead of being an example, as is so frequently urged by some scientific people, that the savage is the original specimen from which we have all risen. In too many parts of the world there is distinct evidence that in places of the earth where savages have existed civilisation once existed. We can well understand this

fact in the case of Australia. It has been practically isolated, and has, therefore, fed on itself as far as intellect is concerned, and has gone down to a most extraordinary degree; not but what, as has been pointed out by the author—and very properly, the race is yet improvable. They can be made to utilise a thing and they can be utilised not only for the ordinary purposes of work, but they are also receptive of religious feeling and religious teaching. In some parts of South Australia there have been institutions for training the aborigines for many years, and not without success, though there have been disappointments; but the extraordinary thing is, that throughout that continent there should be such an obliteration of all the leading features of modern civilisation.

Some things that the author has drawn our attention to exist a thousand miles inland, and therefore they could not have been brought about by any persons touching on the coast of that country at a late period; this shows that the period in which they were done must have been very many ages ago, and that, therefore, anything that can be found there must be a relic of the long past.

Mr. HAWKINS.—It seems to me that if these rock-carvings and paintings were done many years ago, by the ancestors of the present inhabitants, who were more civilised than those of the present day, it raises this difficulty—that they appear to have neglected the representation of the living. If the race who did these carvings had a certain amount of artistic talent they would probably have attempted to delineate the features of those living; but these representations do not give anything like the type of face you now have; these rock-carvings are quite different, and that seems rather to militate against the idea that they were done by the ancestors of the present inhabitants.

A MEMBER.—The scientific may object that the paintings are not by the aborigines of Australia, but by foreign races. I think it is important to know whether the present aborigines are still given to writing and painting. The American Indians are, but the Arabs are not. So I would ask whether the present aborigines of Australia are still a picture-making race.

The BISHOP OF BALLARAT.—I may answer that in the affirmative. The aborigines are fond of painting, and still carve the rocks, and also paint inside caves, and draw on bark. The art of the present day is distinctly inferior to the specimens I have shown you;

but they are a picture-drawing race, and fond of attempts in that direction.

A MEMBER.—The ethnological problem suggested by these various drawings and inscriptions is extremely interesting when you notice that the author has associated the aborigines of Australia with the Cushite race. Some two years ago I was in Australia, and had many conversations with Mr. Worsnop, referred to in the paper; and, as I had some knowledge of Akkadian inscriptions, he asked me if there was any resemblance between the remains of the aborigines of Australia and those of the Syrians and Babylonians. I carefully looked at them, and can see no connection or resemblance. Of course there is the general resemblance that seems to exist in the writings of a number of ancient races—that of picture-writing. I have noticed that the curious head which appears in the Australian drawings with the absence of a mouth, and something like that which has been shown to us, appears in the Hittite inscriptions. In all likelihood, therefore, I should say there must be some connection between the descendants of Ham and the aborigines of Australia, though it is a long jump to go back from the present aborigines to the time when the Hamitic race occupied Babylonia, and wrote those remarkable Akkadian inscriptions which are being read at the present day. Undoubtedly the Akkadian inscriptions belong to a race which had the art of writing even before they came into Babylonia; but these inscriptions were evidently originally made on stone, and in Babylonia there was no stone, and the older cuneiform inscriptions are developments of the older Akkadian. No doubt there must have been a considerable amount of intercourse between Australia and other countries long before the English or even the French set foot upon the island. Mr. Worsnop told me he had—in fact he showed me—an object found buried some 20 feet under the earth at the root of a tree. I am not able to point out the exact geological position where the object was found; but he was good enough to give me an account of it, and to allow me to bring it home and take it to the British Museum, and there the head of the Chinese Department examined it and said it was evidently of Chinese origin, and put the date at something like 200 or 300 years ago. It is the figure of a sage, bearing a pitcher in his hand, which is an emblem of wisdom. The explanation of these objects being found there

may, of course, be accidental intercourse resulting from shipwreck, or something of that kind, or there may have been intercourse for the purposes of trade, or some military expedition; but it certainly shows that the Australians were not absolutely cut off from the rest of the world, but that communication existed between the Australians and other nationalities.

The CHAIRMAN.—We shall be glad to hear the opinions of any visitors who are not Members or Associates.

A VISITOR.—I should like to ask the Bishop of Ballarat what were the compositions of these paints? Was it distemper, or what kind of material?

The BISHOP OF BALLARAT.—Well, the yellow and blue are not decided—I cannot say what they are. The red was burnt clay raddle; the black, charcoal with fish fat mixed with it; the brown is a mixture of black and red. There is also a certain root grown in Australia which produces a kind of red pigment if puddled with water, and that is largely used; but in most cases there is a mixture of oil or fat.

A VISITOR.—Is not it true that the natives do possess considerable and marked intelligence to-day?

The BISHOP OF BALLARAT.—What I have specially dealt with to-day has been art. I do not think what they can produce now is to be compared with what I have shown you to-day.

As to their intelligence, it is very fair in youth; but at sixteen or seventeen years of age they cease to progress, and as a rule no longer care to read, or to pursue their studies. In a few cases they keep up their knowledge. One black in my diocese is a Government sewing-mistress; another teaches the harmonium. Naturally we are anxious to see if we can get an aboriginal ministry from among them, but as yet I see no prospect of it. The little boys and girls are quite equal to our own in apprehensiveness; but in the case of the adults, if you try to exchange ideas with them you find continuous dialogue very difficult. Their mental capacity, although originally promising, seems to have no progressive character.

The CHAIRMAN.—It is generally expected that the Chairman should say something on the subject before the meeting. I must therefore thank those who have spoken, and venture to give you my own views.

Several theories are proposed as to the possible origin of these

extraordinary paintings and carvings. I confess I incline to the idea that they represent a Buddhist Mission. I observe that the features which are represented are not at all of the Australian type, but are very much indeed of the type of the Buddha. The aureole with rays appears to me to have a Buddhistic signification. The aureole, or nimbus, is not, as some imagine, essentially Christian: it is found in Indian coins and sculpture. I notice in one of the designs a sort of likeness to the Indian mark known as *svastika*. The theory that they have belonged to a Buddhist Mission, I think, is a tenable one. But why are the faces without mouths? Because of the silence which is enforced on those who are initiated into the Buddhist mysteries. I would suggest that this view, although not without its difficulties, is the one that explains the peculiarities we observe, better than any other. I would further suggest that in the time of Buddha, 500 years and more before the Christian era, there was a group of islands where the Australian continent is now. I always understood that Australia was rising rapidly, and that the wharfs in Melbourne, now some distance from the sea, were not long since quite close to it. I fancy that Australia, some 500 years before the Christian era, was a Polynesia; and, therefore, we can more easily understand Buddhist missionaries going to and from the various islands, and leaving traces of themselves which appear in these carvings.

The BISHOP OF BALLARAT.—I am much indebted to those who have taken part in the discussion. With regard to the suggestion quoted from Mrs. Parker's work, I am thankful for it, but I have not read the book mentioned.

With regard to the rays round the heads, I was much interested in the reference made by the Chairman to similar rays surrounding the heads of Kings on Indian coins. I never presumed to say that they were necessarily of Christian significance.

Several speakers have concurred in what I said as to Australian degeneration. One gentleman drew attention to the type of face being very different from the aboriginal. One would expect that in pictorial representation they would reproduce the faces with which they were familiar; but that is not so, and it is a most puzzling thing. Remember, I have brought before you "problems" this afternoon, and have not undertaken to solve them. It has to be considered whether some of these sharp angles in the faces may not be the result of unskilful drawing. It is not so

easy to draw curves as sharp lines. The non-Akkadian character, if I may so call it, of the drawings does not seem to correspond (as was pointed out) with those of the Cushite races in lands north of the Persian Gulf; but I do not think that difference would prove that the Australians are not a Cushite race. I think they are, and that they belonged to the eastern tide of emigration of Cushites, and not the western, which presented different characteristics.

One speaker referred to a peculiar object discovered 20 feet below the surface at the foot of a tree, thought to be of Chinese workmanship of two or three hundred years ago. About 20 feet deep in the soil at Ballarat was discovered what you would imagine must have been put there long ago. It was imbedded in solid ground dug out for mining purposes, and what do you think it was? It was the head of a miner's pick of some sixty years before only. Sometimes objects work their way down into the ground, by what means it is hard to explain.

The Chairman's suggestion about the absence of the mouth is very interesting; and I think it quite possible that some of the drawings are Buddhistic. Probably they must be credited to different periods: but it is remarkable that we trace no further relics of Buddhistic teaching. If the absence of a mouth is symbolic of silence, what means the absence of a nose in the case of one of these figures?

As to the elevation of Australia, would not that rather point to less separation by sea from Asia than before? If it has been rising all these ages, surely there would be more islands, as bridges of passage across, than formerly. The interval of sea would be deeper than in days gone by, and easier, not more difficult, to cross. There seems some doubt as to whether Torres Straits have not been deepening.

I thank you for your kind reception of my paper, and for the interesting debate it has elicited.

The meeting was then adjourned.

FURTHER REPLY BY THE AUTHOR.

September 10th, 1897.

It may interest the hearers and readers of my paper to mention, that I have learned further particulars about the sculptures in the Vancouver Lake to which I refer in it: also about the Chinese figure found underground in Australia, mentioned by a member in

the discussion which followed. I now have in my possession excellent photographs of both.

The rock sculpture in Vancouver on closer examination does not exhibit at all clearly the "grooves and sevenbranched candlestick" of the Australian carving to which I compared it. In a paper read before the Natural History Society of British Columbia at Vancouver, May 17 of this year, by Mr. Joseph W. Mackay, of the Indian Department, the carving is explained as a memorial representation of a tree-tomb (hemlock or cedar), with indications of the platforms and scaffold used for the deposit of coffins thereon, and projections on which "totem" boards, banners, weapons and accoutrements were suspended. The paper also mentions as a practice of the Indians the carving of arrows on rocks where a battle had been fought. Perhaps a combination of this with the custom of tree-burial may supply the key to the grooves with arrows and sevenbranched tree-forms, in the Australian carving shown in my paper.

Professor Boas of the Smithsonian Institute, Washington, has given his opinion on the Vancouver carving. He thinks it identical in age and character with another in Sproak's Lake, and the work of an extinct race of Indians who inhabited the Great Central Lake more than a century ago.

The finding of the carving is described in a lecture by Mr. J. W. Laing, M.A. (Oxon.), F.R.A.S., delivered before the Natural History Society of British Columbia and members of the Provincial Legislature in Victoria (B.C.), April 9, 1897.

The Chinese image—carved in gypsum or "soap-stone"—referred to by a member in the discussion on my paper, was found not 20, but 4, feet below the surface, at the foot of a large Banyan tree, when removing it to form a road from Palmerston into the country, in the Northern Territory of South Australia. It is an image of the God of Longevity.

I may say that I have been much indebted for the above information to Rev. J. B. Stair, of St. Arnaud, Victoria, Australia who, I may mention, is bringing out a book on the early days of Samoa, throwing great light, from experience gained in residence there long ago, on the history, religion and customs of the Samoans.*

* These subjects have also been dealt with in the following papers read before the Victoria Institute:—"The Ethnology of the Pacific," with

Since my paper was read I have met with two documents which bear so directly on its topic, that I greatly regret not having seen them earlier, and feel bound to avail myself of an opportunity of commending them to hearers or readers of my paper who have become interested in the Australian cave-drawings.

One of the documents referred to is a paper read June 4th, 1896, before the Royal Society of Victoria, Australia, by Rev. John Mathews, M.A., B.D., on "An Aboriginal Rock Painting in the Victoria Ranges," in my diocese. It is a reprint from the *Transactions* of that Society, and probably may be had from Ford & Son, printers, Carlton, Melbourne. The painting was discovered in 1866, but looks as fresh to-day as when first seen. It was known to the local aborigines from childhood, but they can give no account of its authorship or date. It exhibits different features of aboriginal life, and illustrates the drawings described in my paper by showing the symbol of the conventional-shaped heart, the impression of the human hand, human figures with tapering extremities, and with parts severed from the trunk (apparently in this case by obliteration): while in a corner of the cave were found fragments of dark-red sandstone which had evidently been used in the drawings. One inexplicable figure bears a distinct resemblance to the extraordinary sack-like form, with rayed head and protuberances on one side, encircling an armless human body, discussed in my paper. Not far from the rock-face were found stones which had evidently been used as scaffolding for reaching the high levels of the drawing, and afterwards removed, which may explain how the loftier drawings mentioned in my paper were executed.

The other document is a paper by the same author, in which the ray-crowned bust, and the draped figure with inscription on the turban, discussed in my paper, are examined, and the theory broached that the former is the Hindu Siva, and the latter Siva's consort, Parvati (Kali, or Devi), portrayed by immigrants from Sumatra. This is supported by quotations from the *Bataksh-Nederduitsch Woordenboek* and *Les Manuscrits Lamponcs* of H. N.

a special chart of the distribution of the various races therein, by Rev. S. J. Whitmee, vol. xiv; "The Samoan Tradition of the Creation," with notes on the Islands, by the Rev. T. Powell, F.L.S., vol. xx; "The Aborigines of Australia, their ethnic position and relations," by J. Fraser, Esq., LL.D., F.R.S. (N.S.W.), vol. xxii.

Van der Tuuk. In the Lampong character the inscription reads "Daibaitah," the name of a deity of the Battas of Sumatra ("Dewattah" with the Baijus of Borneo) represented by a Trinity corresponding to Vishnu, Brahma, and Siva: the root of Daibaitah and its variants being the Sanskrit Deva (comp. Divus). The circlelets on the right hand of the robed figure are found in connection with Hindu representations of Devi, who is also shown holding a skull in her hand, seated on a serpent, and with a halo round the head, — features observable in the sack-like figure already referred to. The tassel-ornaments, and large spiked earring, are also found in Sumatra: while the figure of a crocodile is found under the roof-tree of Sumatran temples,—to which the strange monster shown in my paper, with two human figures, may correspond. The whole pamphlet of Mr. Mathews is of great interest; it is published in part I, vol. xxiii, of the *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, which may be purchased at the offices of that Institute.

FURTHER COMMUNICATION RECEIVED.

The Rev. C. J. WOOD, B.A., D.D., of York, Penna, U.S.A., writes in 1898:—

The data afforded by Bishop Thornton are interesting and of extreme value to the anthropologist. The figures described in the paper appear to be of different dates and *motifs*. It is quite possible that figures 1 to 5 may be due to Hindu influence—not necessarily Buddhist. The nimbuses which appear in figures 1, 2, and 4 might be pre-Buddhistic. The following figures up to 9 express a more primitive thought. With regard to the absence of a mouth in several figures, this is significant. A review of the ceremonial masks, the masks of the sacred dance, as observed by primitive peoples the world over shows an intentional omission of the mouth in instances. The nose is seldom omitted; the eyes, I should say, never. This omission of the mouth in the sacred mask (which, by the way, always represented some divine power) had a distinct significance. It remains to be shown that that significance or symbolism is silence. More likely it means sexual purity, or else freedom from the necessity of eating. The same mouthless masks and figures will be found alike in North America and Melanesia. The nimbus, it may be added in conclusion, will be found in the picture writings of the Western Hemisphere.