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DAVID NUTT, LONG ACRE.

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1901.

Majesty's deep interest in the religious and intellectual welfare of her subjects.

“They desire at the same time to tender to Your Majesty the humble expression of their devoted loyalty, and pray that God may long preserve Your Majesty's life in health and happiness, to rule over a loyal, contented, and prosperous people.”

It was moved by the Rev. Prebendary WACE, D.D., and seconded by DAVID HOWARD, Esq., D.L., and carried unanimously, that the above Address be adopted.

The following paper by E. J. Statham, Assoc. M.Inst.C.E., entitled “Ancient Script in Australia,” was then read by the Secretary in the absence of the Author.

ANCIENT SCRIPT IN AUSTRALIA. By E. J.
STATHAM, Esq., Assoc. M.Inst.C.E.

MORE than half a century has elapsed since the late Sir George Grey's discovery of the remarkable drawings illustrated in the Right Rev. S. Thornton's paper on “Problems of Aboriginal Art in Australia” (*Transactions of the Victoria Institute*, Vol. XXX, page 205); yet it appears that only now is the great interest and value of those records becoming apparent.

Since the publication of the volume of proceedings of the Brisbane Session of the Australian Association for the Advancement of Science—from which Dr. Thornton's illustrations are derived—another Session of the Association has been held at Sydney (proceedings not yet published), and an interesting paper contributed by Professor John Campbell, LL.D., of Montreal, on “Syllabic Characters on a Cave Painting on the Glenelg River, N.W. Australia,” was read before the Section devoted to ethnology and anthropology. The characters treated of are those shown in figure 4 of Dr. Thornton's paper.

To ascertain the meaning of these characters Dr. Fraser, LL.D., of Sydney, submitted a copy of the figure to the professor, who unhesitatingly pronounced the characters on the head to be old Japanese, earlier than the twelfth century

A.D. According to the old Japanese syllabary the inscription read "*Ki o chi o sa shi*," or in words "*Kiochi osa shi*," which meant "The number of the hopeless ones is 62" (the number of o's in the upright column on the right hand side of the figure), the conclusion being drawn that the record had reference to shipwrecked Japanese. It was also stated that similar character and language are found on the American Continent.

In the more detailed and coloured drawing which is given in the Australian Association's publication, the figure in question is shown to be not only clothed but shod, apparently with a soled boot without heel, such as those made and worn by Hindoos. In contrast with this clothed figure and evidently of the same period of art is shown a figure, nude, except for the turbaned head, on which he is carrying a kangaroo; the man's feet are well drawn and the toes clearly delineated. It appears, therefore, that both full attire and the fashion of its absolute abandonment—as prevalent with the Aborigines in their wild state—was familiar to the artist or artists who drew these pictures. The 62 o's accompanying the clothed figure have a peculiar method of arrangement, being vertically in three columns and horizontally either singly, or two or three approximately in a line; there is, doubtless, some meaning in this, possibly the three columns may represent men, women, and children, and the grouping may show their affinity. That there were women in the assemblage is evident by the representation of clothed female figures in the same style of drawing. It may be presumed that the "hopeless ones" were a party of emigrants bound for Java, Timor, or one of the intermediate islands, blown out of their course in one of the cyclonic disturbances frequent in these latitudes, and carried to the N.W. coast of Australia.

Whilst it would be going beyond the evidence to contend that these were the first inhabitants of Australia, it is quite within the range of possibility that they may have been. The Aboriginal Australian is a distinct race, bronze rather than black-skinned, tall, straight-haired and bearded; of one language, differing merely in dialect; moreover, unique in weapons, customs, laws and ceremonies. It has been too much the habit of writers on the subject to decry the Australian as the lowest of the human race; far from that he is—under favouring conditions—unsurpassed in physical perfection and thoroughly adapted to his environment. See

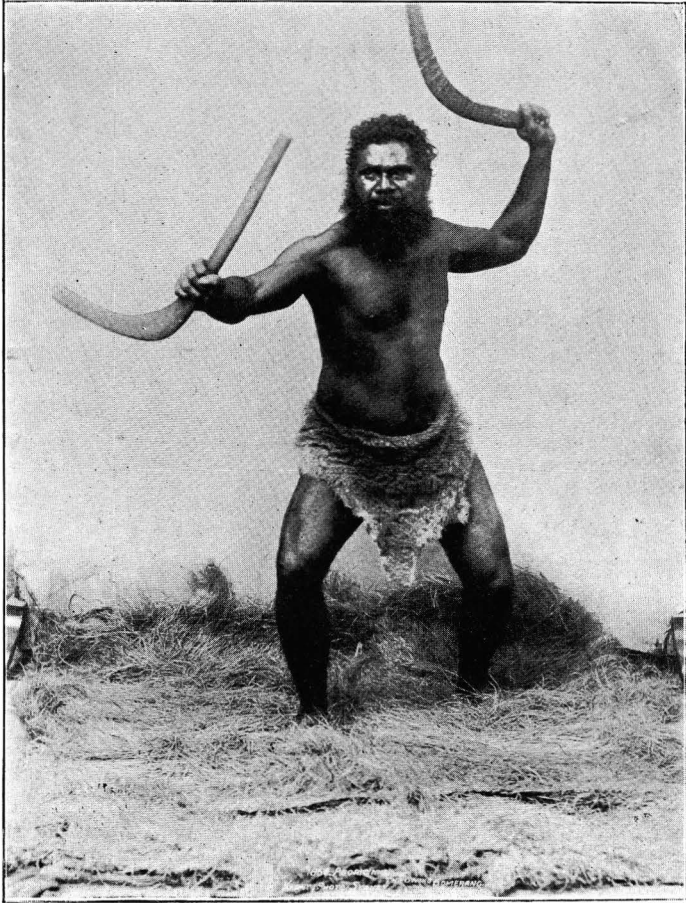
the grand specimen of a man shown in the accompanying photograph, a warrior (see Plate VIII); a "mighty hunter before the Lord"; only forty years ago such men were plentiful, now, alas! they are scarce; contact with our civilization has destroyed them, drink has done its deadly work, above all, clothing and blankets have been fatal to them.

Governor Phillip estimated the Aboriginal population at the close of last century at one million—admittedly on insufficient data; later writers on more extended information estimate at half a million. At the census of 1891 the Aboriginal population for New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and West Australia is given as 38,304. Queensland is not given, but the blacks being more numerous there than elsewhere in Australia, possibly there may be 40,000, so that the grand total can hardly exceed 80,000, and it seems probable that even the half million estimate of original population was excessive; allowing, however, that it may have attained that amount, and turning to the analogy of Scripture history, we find that the Israelites went down into Egypt "70 persons," and at the exodus in little more than 200 years numbered 603,550 *men*.

In contrast with this we have a record of 62 persons, who—if the first inhabitants—had before them a land free from enemies, teeming with animal life, a mild climate, every facility to increase and multiply, with 600 years in which to fulfil their destiny, and yet they can only represent half a million; it therefore seems demonstrated that the numerical development of the Australian race does not postulate a high antiquity. If the first settlement of population were on the N.W. coast, its distribution would naturally trend north and south along the coast line; along the north coast they would find conditions of life easy, and every requisite to ensure rapid increase and the development of a fine physique; then as population increased, it would gravitate down the east coast, finding extensive and rich valleys very few miles apart. Again, not far from the Queensland coast line, extensive downs well stocked with game all the way to the head waters of the Darling, opening out a veritable "land of promise" extending into the heart of the continent and away down to South Australia.

All the conditions tend to the development of a race of hunters and fishers, and the encouragement of a roving disposition, hence so few relics of any sort to show what the migrations of the people have been.

PLATE VIII.



AUSTRALIAN WARRIOR—FLOURISHING BOOMERANGS.

An image carved in "soapstone" is referred to (pp. 226, 230, of Dr. Thornton's original paper) as having been found in the northern territory of South Australia, stated to be "an image of the god of longevity"; as a strange coincidence it may be mentioned that in the Technological Museum of Sydney is an exhibit bearing the following description: "Plaster cast of soapstone carving (? Thibetan priest on camel), original found 25 feet below surface at Northern territory, Australia." It represents a hooded figure clothed in a long flowing robe and seated on a camel; it has been in the museum several years; inquiries so far have failed to elicit further information as to the original, which acquires new interest in view of late researches.

Sydney, N.S.W.

October 15th, 1898.

The following letter from the author of the paper, and addressed to Captain Petrie, contains some additional matter of interest, and may find a place here:—

"Rockdale, N.S.W.

"October 15th, 1898.

"Dear Captain Petrie,

"I am sending herewith a paper and a photo. which may interest the Members of the Institute, and would ask you to kindly bring it under notice. Without setting up for an authority or laying claim to any status as an anthropologist I have nevertheless travelled over a large extent of Australia, have had many opportunities of studying the natives, and have taken an interest in their manners, customs, and traditions. In venturing to differ from Dr. Thornton in his conclusion that the antiquity of the arrival of the native race of Australians is attested by 'the complicated diversity of the tribal vocabularies, and the length of time required for the whole continent to have been overrun by them,' I would point out that in the comparatively small island of Great Britain you have, extant, three distinct languages, and various dialects, yet you can hardly be regarded as an ancient people. Again, seeing that early in the settlement of these Colonies by the British, explorers went all over the country, even with hostile natives to contend with, it would be surprising if the original immigrants did not overrun it in the first generation, there being no carnivora at all formidable until the introduction of the 'dingo,'

and considering the extreme fecundity of the Marsupialæ, means of subsistence must have been exceedingly easy. Since the disappearance of the Aborigines in some localities, the opossums have increased to such an extent that whole tracts of timber country have been destroyed on account of the trees being denuded of their leaves by them. The poisoning of the 'dingo' in other localities has been followed by such an increase of the kangaroo that various methods have been adopted to effect their wholesale destruction. Again the rabbit has got adrift within the last 20 years and has overrun New South Wales and Victoria, has become a burning political question, and has cost hundreds of thousands of pounds to cope with. It may thus be seen how possible it is that the primitive increase and distribution of the natives may have been very rapid. If you have not the *Proceedings of the Australian Association* you certainly should have them in the library, as they contain a great deal of information on these subjects.

" I remain,

" Dear Captain Petrie,

" Yours faithfully,

" E. J. STATHAM."

DISCUSSION.

The PRESIDENT.—According to our usual practice I should now invite remarks on this paper. At the same time I would say that the subject of the paper is one that seems hardly to lend itself to much discussion, and the remarks that may be made, I hope, will not be very long, as the Secretary has more photographic slides here, and preparations have been made for projecting them on the screen in illustration of some questions which he has brought before the Society on river valleys under the ocean.

Mr. MARTIN ROUSE.—Mr. President, about twenty years ago a Japanese junk was stranded on the coast of Oregon in the United States of America, and it led Professor Daniel Wilson, of Toronto, to write a paper on the possibility of ancient blood relationship with the Japanese amongst the American Indians, and of the spreading of civilization from Eastern Asia through such means. Such events must often have happened in the past,

through the great cyclones that are prevalent in those vast oceans.

But now the question arises whether these Australian blacks could have been descended from the Japanese, they being so unlike them in their personal appearance. The Japanese have oval faces, with rounded foreheads, and their eyes are slightly oblique, whereas this figure in the paper of an Australian represents him with a broad face and a forehead by no means prominent, and eyes perfectly straight. He has a face, I should say from my little observation, intermediate between that of an European and a negro. His lower jaw, however, does not seem to protrude much like that of a negro; but his nose is very broad, like that of the usual negro type. On the other hand his hair and beard are long and copious, both of which features are unlike those of the Japanese. But we know that in Japan there is a race of people, called Inas, who are noted for their abundance of hair, and the Japanese records tell us that they had many encounters in early days with "hairy barbarians." Those people now inhabit the north of Japan; but it is very likely that they were driven out from a wider extent of territory anciently.

It is thought by some that the Japanese early races come from Siberia, as they bear so striking a resemblance to the Eskimo of America and Asia, and that they overcame the Ainos in the North, and the Malays in the South; leaving the more inclement regions finally to the subject Ainos. Be that as it may, the natives of Australia might possibly have descended from the Ainos; and as the Ainos, so far as I am aware, had no written language, they would, on landing in Australia (if they knew the Japanese writing) naturally make a record therein. But while that is possible, there is this against it—that Professor Haddon, who is a very great investigator into the appearances, manners, customs, traditions, and language of the natives in and around New Guinea and Borneo, recently spending a day or two with the Yanai-kanna Tribe near Cape York in the far North of Australia, when returning from New Guinea, as I heard him tell at Dover the year before last,* and he found that while of Australian build and aspect, they had customs very similar to those of the Papuans,

* *Brit. Assoc. Report*, 1899, p. 585.

especially in the manner of initiating children into manhood; while they must have spoken a language similar to those of the Papnans, or he would not have understood the explanations in the very short time at his disposal.

So, without mentioning other evidence, we must infer that the immigrants who first peopled Australia must have settled over large tracts of Oceania besides.

Commander HEATH, R.N.—Having lived in Australia for many years and having seen these natives in various parts of the country, from Port Albany, in Western Australia, to the most northern point of Queensland in Torres Strait, and also at Port Essington on the North West Coast, I cannot see the slightest reason for thinking that there is any connection whatever between the Japanese and the Australian natives, or even with the hairy Ainos, the Australian native not being a particularly hairy individual.

The picture that we have before us does not represent the Australian native under normal conditions: I have never seen one so fat as this. Though many of them are well developed, they as a rule have no superfluous flesh about them, and the calf of the leg, which here appears so conspicuously, is generally one of their weakest points, the way in which they often sit being somewhat injurious to its development. They are extremely intelligent and clever as hunters and fishermen, and their perceptive organs are wonderfully developed, no doubt from having for many generations been dependent for their food upon what they could catch. Over a large portion of the country there is nothing on which they can fatten. The few animals that they could catch would not help them much, while the dryness of the climate over a great part of the year prevents their obtaining anything like a liberal supply of vegetable food, which consists principally of the tuber of the wild yam. They have no idea of cultivation of any sort, never living at one spot for any time. The white woman whom we rescued from the natives at Cape York, in H.M.S. *Rattlesnake*, who had been living with the natives for some five years—during which time she had never seen a white man, and had almost forgotten her own language—gave us to understand that at times they were very short of food, though those living on the coast were better off, as they had fish when they could catch them.

It is curious that the natives distributed over this large continent are so much alike in appearance and characteristics, and yet that the area over which any one tribe has possession is very limited. When some time ago Bishop Thornton read a paper on a somewhat similar subject to the present one, his brother the Archdeacon of Middlesex, who was in the chair, suggested that the drawings found in certain caves in Australia represented Hindoo Buddhist missionaries who had come over on a mission to the natives, but of course it is not improbable that wrecked crews from different parts of the world have reached this coast and have left traces behind them.

The impression that the Australian natives have left on me is, that they were separated from the rest of the world by the convulsion which separated Australia from the Asiatic continent, during the Marsupial period, and that like the Marsupials they have never made any further progress.

Mr. ROUSE.—Would the Japanese or the Inos wear a turban? I never heard of it.

Commander HEATH.—No; but the Hindoos would.

Mr. ROUSE.—It occurred to me that it is more likely that such men came from Java, or one of the islands affected by Hindoo Buddhists' customs.

The SECRETARY.—I think we ought to recollect, in reference to the author of this paper, that that picture undoubtedly represents an Australian. He did not manufacture him, or bring him from another country, or take a photograph of him from another country. He is there and we have to account for it, and he endeavours to account for the appearance of these remarkable figures by their contiguity with Europeans and their habits.

Mr. ROUSE.—I should like to say that this is the first picture I ever saw of an Australian that represented him as a very hairy man indeed, with a bushy head of hair and a bushy beard.

A vote of thanks to the author having been accorded, the SECRETARY then exhibited and explained lantern pictures on the screen illustrating the river beds at the bottom of the ocean.

The meeting then adjourned.