

THE RED PAGE.

Black Australia.

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Nonetheless the very earliest and most accurately note the primitive characteristics of this unguinean race. And the pioneer settlers of our older districts have let the opportunity slip...

But civilisation, at best, is comparative; and these people had reached a degree beyond that of our own final foetuses in the west yesterday...

The winemakers spear was about 5ft. in length, and fit, in diameter; straight, hard, and uniform thickness. It was the single stem of a suitable kind of scrub, pooled clean, burned and scraped to a point at one end, and hewed at the other to receive the claw of the winemaker.

The barbed spear, about 6ft. in length, and its equivalent with a fin of sharp flints along each side—was always, straight, hard, and was, of course, used only as a lance, never as a missile.

Our blackfolds had two varieties of booming, distinguished by the manner in which they invariably made of waste, and taken from the junction of trunk and root. The booming for direct flight was longer, stiffer, and straighter than the other.

This booming has two distinct motions: the direct impetus, and the axial revolution. It is the latter alone which forms the inclination of its plane and engages aerial support.

The weapon is usually described as a missile which will strike a man in its flight and return to the feet of the thrower. This is entirely misleading.

According to original purpose, it was usually made to descend a spear-cast in front of the thrower, after passing far beyond the vertical line of that point. The weapon was designed to seek cover—to force a sheltered enemy into frontal encounter.

I remember a blackfold—a young man, tall and athletic, genial and intelligent—who frequented our place, with his father. In compliment to my father he had assumed the name of "Sam."

My father—then incidentally collecting specimens for a private museum in the old country—offered to treat with Sam for his shield; but the postulated blackfold forced the shield on him at present. Otherwise fully armed, Sam left our place; and next day his father returned alone.

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to descend a spear-cast in front of the thrower, after passing far beyond the vertical line of that point. The weapon was designed to seek cover—to force a sheltered enemy into frontal encounter. And, apart from explosives, no other engine so efficient in that branch of tactics has ever been invented.

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author's catalogue, while the two latter haven't even that in complete form. Here there is a full author's catalogue from 1868-1902 as well as a subject index from 1868-1902. This is a considerable improvement even on the Australian dictionary-form responsible for such unconscious humor as "Bill on Liberty."

While nothing could be more admirable than Dewey's decimal system of notation, the Sydney subject index from 1868 to the present has recently been compiled, and is now in the printer's hands—a little job that will alone cost £100, containing as it does 50 volumes. Put a dozen men to subject-index books under cross-headings and the result will be chaos.

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not had taste, name more than one Australian woman-writer who does so, whenever said affairs are efficiently interesting. Their realism is their greatest claim on the mind of the voracious reader. For my own part, I believe with Nietzsche that it is not possible to understand other people's blood. Or at all that is written. Live only that which the writer wrote with his blood. Write with blood and show your heart that blood is spirit."

"S.T.S.," Goodall, R.A., in failing for £11,000, pleaded the decreased value of art by living artists. "So, artists, die that your pictures may live" (B. 278/02). Curious that this is the whole plot of the late Mrs. Oliphant's best short story, "Mr. Sandford." He lived to see his work going begging, but a kindly accident removed him just as his extensively-educated sons and daughters had begun to complain of his sudden change completely every 40 years or less, and a popular idiom who happens to live long enough is likely to find the public cruel. Just at present the notable slump is in Londoners.

Who says all the genius is gone out of religious writings? This is a verse from a poem in a Scottish paper—

When we creep so slowly upward,
When each day new burdens bring,
When we strive so hard to conquer
Vexing arbitrary things,
When we wait, and toll, and suffer,
When we work for our sins,
The last line deserves immortality.

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The Crown of Majesty, 2s. 6d., postage 6d. De Grey, From the Ashes, 2s. 6d., p. 6d. The Windy Road, 2s. 6d., p. 6d. Fred (Ed. Campbell), My Australian Childhood, 16s., 12d. Miles, A Tale of the Hermitage, 2s. 6d., p. 6d. Miller, Comstock, 2s. 6d., p. 6d. Hopkins, From the Ashes, 2s. 6d., p. 6d.

Black Australia

JOSEPH FURPHY

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Meston is right (B 16/8/'02). Despite the undeniable brain-power of the blacks, their extreme conservatism has completed its circle in a certain feckless pliancy, which is not adaptability. They welcome the steel tomahawk, but they keep it no sharper than the old diorite implement. Ironbound prescription has atrophied the initiative of the race, dooming it to a future like its past, or no future at all. Therefore distraction means collapse and dissolution. Actual injury could only accelerate an end which the mere advent of a disturbing element had made inevitable.

None but the very earliest settlers could accurately note the primitive characteristics of this unique race. And the pioneer settlers of our older districts have let the opportunity slip. For one thing, there was no money in ethnology. For another thing, all British textbooks, in their large, off-hand way, placed the Australian aborigines lowest in the scale of humanity. And what argument from fact or experience can withstand a British platitude?

But civilisation, at best, is comparative; and these people had reached a degree beyond that of our own lineal forefathers in the mere yesterday of ethnographical record. Moreover, though so hopelessly fettered by the tyranny of immemorial precedent, the intellectual competency of the race was by no means exhausted at this stage. We have aboriginal skulls which indicate a mental capacity beyond that of the average white man; some showing a mathematical faculty of very high order.

The aborigines of the Upper Yarra, amongst whom my own earliest years were passed, differed considerably in armament, tribal usages, and modes of life, from the blacks described by Meston, Stockdale, Dr Roth, and other first hand authorities. (I may mention that my father and mother were Port Phillip immigrants of Feb., '41—following Batman and Fawkner by only 5½ years—and that they spent their first 11 years on the Upper Yarra, where I was born in '43. Hence my own early recollections of the blacks are checked and authenticated by the maturer observation of my parents.) And it may be borne in mind that, at the time and place referred to, the shadow of extinction had not perceptibly closed round what was virtually the last generation of that primeval race. In those days the blackfellow's unconscious skill in the use of his weapons was so perfect that a mere description would be likely to excite the cheap incredulity which so often veils lack of information.

The wimmera spear was about 5 ft. in length, and ½ in. in diameter; straight, hard, and of uniform thickness. It was the single stem of a suitable kind of scrub, peeled clean, burned and scraped to a point at one end, and hollowed at the other to receive the claw of the wimmera. The momentum of this weapon was terrific, and its level trajectory must have rendered it almost invisible from the front; yet the nerve and

alertness of the blackfellow were such that his light box-wood shield—its 6 in. of width presented diagonally—was a sufficient protection. Touching accuracy of aim—my father saw a blackfellow, at 40 yards distance, send his three spears, in rapid succession, through the finger-hole below the latch in the closed door of an empty hut. The hole would not be more than 1½ inches in diameter.

The barbed spear, about 6½ft. in length—or its equivalent with a fin of sharp flints along each side—was always made of ironbark, and was, of course, cut out of the standing tree. This weapon was used only as a lance, never as a missile. I remember that one of the performances required from a candidate for the degree of manhood was to run down a doe kangaroo, and impale her on his ‘jag-spear’. The rite of initiation consisted of knocking out the two upper front teeth of the aspirant, and seaming his chest with a dozen, or more, formidable looking scars. No adult male aboriginal was without these badges of virility.

Our blackfellows had two varieties of boomerang, distinguishable at a glance, but both invariably made of wattle, and taken from the junction of trunk and root. The boomerang for direct flight was longer, heavier, and straighter than the other. It was thrown horizontally, with a flat, or even hollow, trajectory. This was a formidable weapon, of astonishing range, though serviceable only in open country. The return boomerang was a scientific masterpiece; a marvellously successfully adaptation of simple means to a difficult end. According to Brough Smyth, Major Mitchell was so impressed by the anomalous properties of this weapon, during his famous expedition of '35, that he afterwards turned the principle to account by patenting a ‘boomerang propeller’ for steam boats. But this must be incorrect, as there is no corresponding record in the long line of patents issued for that appliance. In any case, the suggestion betrays a scientific misconception. The object of a propeller is to obtain the maximum of thrust with the minimum of peripheral disturbance; whilst the boomerang is fashioned to reduce aerial resistance to the lowest possible amount, meantime enlisting the air itself as a support against gravitation. It is this aerial support, commanded by the shape of the return-boomerang, which causes the weapon, when its projectile force is exhausted, to return diagonally, with its original vigor diminished only by the fraction expended in air-resistance.

This boomerang has two distinct motions; the direct impetus, and the axial revolution. It is the latter alone which fixes the inclination of its plane and engages aerial support. The apex of its flight is reached when the direct force is spent; then the weapon, inadequate to further advance, and held in perfect poise by its rotary motion, returns at an angle determined by its axial inclination. And the whole aerial career of the boomerang—this studied transition from direct motion to retrograde—was regulated with a view to the final striking-point.

The weapon is usually described as a missile which will strike an object in its flight and return to the feet of the thrower. This is entirely misleading. The whole course of the boomerang, direct and return, depends on an equilibrium which would be fatally disturbed by impact with any object during its flight. Nor was the weapon designed to return to the feet of the thrower. According to original purpose, it was usually made to descend a spear-cast in front of the thrower, after passing far beyond the vertical line of that point. The weapon was designed to *search cover*—to force a sheltered enemy into frontal encounter. And, apart from explosives, no other engine so efficient in that

branch of tactics has ever been invented. Besides this, it was similarly used to confuse an enemy's guard by rear-attack. The aboriginal warrior was far from regarding it as a toy. An incident, illustrating the potency of the weapon in actual combat, holds place amongst my own early recollections.

I remember a blackfellow—a young man, tall and athletic, genial and intelligent—who frequented our place, with his lubra. In compliment to my father he had assumed the name of 'Sam'. My father—then incidentally collecting specimens for a private museum in the old country—offered to treat with Sam for his shield; but the good-natured blackfellow forced the shield on him as a present. Otherwise fully armed, Sam left our place; and next day his lubra returned alone, half-distracted, her face lacerated by self-inflicted tomahawk cuts. Her husband had fallen in single combat, a victim to inter-tribal vendetta. When Sam met his assailant his lubra was, as usual, travelling 50 or 100 yards in the rear, to avoid startling kangaroos or other game. Each warrior took cover behind a tree, and the fight began. My memory does not hold the details clearly enough for precise description. But, at all events, each combatant was driven from shelter by the return flight of the other's boomerang; but while the opponent covered himself with his shield during exposure, Sam was transfixed by a spear. Then the victor rushed upon Sam as he fell, gashed his loins with repeated tomahawk blows, and tore out his kidney-fat. When he had gone his way with his ghastly trophy, Sam's lubra approached, and stayed with her husband till he died. At our place she found others of her tribe, who buried Sam with the observances of his race.

This took place not more than 30 miles from Melbourne, early in '51—say 15½ years after Fawcner's *Enterprise* was moored in the Yarra. At that time the blackfellows had entirely vanished from many districts of Victoria. No historian has had access to the details of their passing. Doubtless, sheep were occasionally speared; doubtless, poisoned flour was occasionally dropped from station drays. But let it be recorded, to the honour of the Ryries and other pioneer settlers on the Upper Yarra, that, from first to last, their treatment of the blacks was irreproachable.

Tom Collins.