TRANSACTIONS

OF THE

ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY

OF LONDON.

VOL. I.

NEW SERIES.

LONDON:
PUBLISHED FOR THE ETHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY,
BY
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.
1861.

Islands, however different in appearance, to have sprung from the same stock, and hence, all the people speaking them, black, swarthy, and fair, to be of one and the same race of man, is utterly groundless, and the mere dream of very learned men, and perhaps even more imaginative than learned. I can by no means, then, agree with a very learned professor of Oxford, that the same blood ran in the veins of the soldiers of Alexander and of Clive as in those of the Hindus whom, at the interval of two-and-twenty ages, they both scattered with the same facility. I am not prepared, like him, to believe that an English jury, unless it were a packed one of learned Orientalists, with the ingenious professor himself for its foreman, would, "after examining the hoary documents of language," admit "the claim of a common descent between Hindu, Greek, and Teuton," for that would amount to allowing that there was no difference in the faculties of the people that produced Homer and Shakespear, and those that have produced nothing better than the authors of the Mahabarat and Ramayana; no difference between the home-keeping Hindus, who never made a foreign conquest of any kind, and the nations who discovered, conquered, and peopled a new world.

XXII.—*Some Particulars of the General Characteristics, Astronomy, and Mythology of the Tribes in the Central Part of Victoria, Southern Australia.* By W. E. STANBRIDGE, F.E.S., of Wombat, Victoria.

As so little appears generally known of the aborigines of Australia, and, as they have the reputation of being lowest in the scale of mankind, occupying a country so far removed from, and possessing so little in common with, other countries, it may not be inappropriate at the present time, when so much inquiry is directed to the origin of species, to lay before you some particulars of their character, habits, and ideas, from observations made during a residence of eighteen years in the wilds of Victoria, Southern Australia.

The aborigines of Victoria are associated in tribes or families, the members of which vary very much in number. Generally several tribes are united for mutual purposes under one head or chief, which office appears to be hereditary. The affairs of each tribe are managed by the old men and doctors or priests. The father or husband has uncontrolled power in his own family, even over the life of his wife. The people are very thinly scattered over the country; but each tribe has its own

boundaries, which are conterminous with those of other tribes, and the land so included has been from time immemorial parcelled out amongst its families and transmitted by direct descent to the present generation. Females inherit as well as males, but as the former frequently marry into distant tribes, their right is of but little benefit to them. This absence, however, does not impair the claim of their descendants. So much are these boundaries respected, that the member of one family does not go into the lands of his neighbour unless previously invited, hence the difficulty of inducing a native to remain at a station that is not on his own patrimony.

Unlike the aborigines of Tasmania, whose colour is black, with black woolly hair, those of Victoria have complexions of various shades of dark olive brown, and in some instances so light that a tinge of red is perceptible in the cheeks of the young, with slightly curly black hair, but there are isolated cases of woolly hair amongst the men and dark brown hair amongst the women. This difference in the colour of the skin is very marked in the half-breeds, the Tasmanian being of the black or negro hue, while the Australian is of a brown or gipsy tinge.

They are straight limbed, square shouldered, slightly but compactly made; occasionally an individual of herculean proportions is met with. There are none amongst them who are deformed, except those who have become so by accident. The men vary in stature from five, to, in a few cases, upwards of six feet. They have thick beards, high cheek bones, rather large black eyes, protruding eyebrows which make the forehead appear to recede more than it really does, as high foreheads are not uncommon amongst them; thickish noses, which are sometimes straight and sometimes curved upwards, very large mouths and teeth; the size of the latter and the squareness of the jaw are probably caused by continually tearing food with the teeth, as young children have not that squareness of jaw, neither have boys who have lived almost entirely with white people. Their mode of whistling, which consists in drawing the lower lip with the finger and thumb tightly on one side, has its influence, no doubt, on the size of the lips. The men of the Coorong, who subsist almost wholly upon fish, have much smaller mouths and thinner lips, their eyebrows also are not so heavy. In appearance they much resemble the New Zealanders.

There is a ceremony when boys arrive at puberty previous to taking rank with the men, at which, in some tribes, a doctor knocks out one of the upper front teeth, in other tribes both of the upper front teeth; again, there are tribes in which the

form the rugs with which both sexes are usually clothed: various devices in regular patterns are scraped with a shell upon the skins to make them supple, and they are coloured red or yellow according to taste. Wallaby and small kangaroo skins are used for the same purposes. The men wear the rug secured over the shoulder by a peg, which leaves the right arm at liberty. Women wear it as a cloak, the string of the net or basket worn at the back keeps it in its place, and there can be formed when required a hood for carrying an infant.

A good opossum rug contains about sixty skins, but old women and children frequently have little more than sufficient to cover their backs. Excepting the girdle or small apron of suspended strings, twisted from bark, which is always worn by females until maturity; young persons otherwise almost discard clothing in warm weather.

Children generally have two names, one derived from their birthplace, the other from some characteristic in later life; for example, a boy was born under a woorack (Banksia), he was, therefore, named Yab-woorack, or leaf of the woorack; in after life, from the length of his legs, he was called Dittenaranarry.

In summer, bathing is much practised, but there is no attempt to cleanse the person. The ordinary mode of refreshing the face is to rub upon it a little grease, which is then wiped off, and the face decorated with raddle; this, with some grease upon the hair, and the latter drawn under a band round the head, completes that part of the toilet.

It is the business of the female to construct the lodge, which is usually a screen formed of boughs and grass, placed in a crescent form, and supported by a rude framework, which is kept in a slanting position by a prop; the back is placed to windward and the fire is made sufficiently in front to enable the occupants to lie between it and the screen. When in the vicinity of large trees, in wet weather, the men strip sheets of bark to be used instead of boughs, these generally require the application of heat to prevent them cracking while being opened flat; for this purpose they are placed over a small fire, the smoke of which gives a film of black to the sap side, and upon this, not unfrequently, they make rude drawings of men in corroboree, of kangaroo or emu hunts, or of men fighting.

In the neighbourhood of Mount Gambier some of the lodges or oolahs are very pretty, being dome-shaped, and constructed of boughs closely interwoven, with a small arched opening for the entrance, and a little aperture in the crown for the escape of the smoke. To throw down a lodge, although it may have been abandoned for months, is a very great insult, and a proof of a desire to destroy the family to whom it belonged.

It is also the female's province to clear away the grass within the lodge, lest it should take fire, to collect firewood and make the fire, which is always very small, so that it may not attract the attention of an enemy. When travelling they always carry fire, that is, a piece of lighted bark. She fetches water if it be near in a bowl-shapen excrescence of some tree; but if far away, it is carried in a small skin taken off the animal through the opening of the neck; either the feet and tail are left on, or the openings are secured by a sinew. She also gathers any edible roots or succulent vegetables that grow in the neighbourhood. The fleshy roots in general use are called cooloor, palilla and munya; the two first, species of geranium, are of an acrid flavour until roasted, the last is sweet, and frequently eaten uncooked; the roots of the bulrush and another aquatic plant are also occasionally used for food. The succulent vegetables in general use are the young tops of the munya, the sow-thistle, and several kinds of fig-marigold.

At Mount Gambier the females collect large quantities of the roots of the fern, which are eaten when baked, as well as the pretty green and gold frogs, and a very fleshy mushroom, which is red on the upper and green on the under side; these are brought home strung on rushes. Our mushroom is very rarely used. In spring they gather cakes of wattle (mimosa) gum, and use it dissolved in water. The implement with which these roots are gathered, and which is constantly carried by the women for offensive and defensive purposes, is a small pole, seven or eight feet long, straightened and hardened by fire, flattened and pointed at the end.

The men hunt sometimes alone, but generally in company. If opossums or squirrels are the game, the motcha is in constant requisition for cutting notches in the bark of the trees, for the reception of the ball of the great toe, to enable the hunter to climb to the holes where the opossums seclude themselves during the day. If the little protuberance caused by the wood grub meet the eye of the hunter, the motcha will assist him to that which will at once help to appease his appetite and recruit his energy. The result of the day's sport will be from five to fourteen opossums.

The motcha is an oblong flattened piece of black stone, like lava, sharpened at the end, and fixed in a strip of wattle; the wattle is bent round the stone and the two ends tied together for the handle; the stone is made fast with a cement of gum and ground shells.

If the object of the chase be the kangaroo or emu, the weapons are some light spears, with the wummera to throw them; and if the country be very open, a shield of green boughs fas-

On small streams, weirs of stakes and twigs are made for the flooding water to pass through, and a conical sack or basket made of rushes, about eight feet deep and three feet wide at the mouth, is placed in the middle of the stream to catch small fish.

The nests of the loan abound with eggs, at the same time that the pityecol, or native peach, and the fruit of the sandal-wood are ripe; the fruit of the last named tree, and the bark of its young roots, are roasted before eaten. All these are most abundant in parts of the country far removed from permanent water, therefore the hunter has to draw his supply of that element from the roots of the swamp-box and weir-mallee, which run a few inches below the surface of the earth; sometimes five pints of this water, which is very good, are taken from one root.

Loan nests are generally twelve feet across, and about three feet above the surface of the ground. At the commencement of winter the loans open out the old nest, and during the winter scratch into it all the leaves and twigs that are within twenty yards; at the end of the wet season they cover them with about two feet of earth; a space of eighteen inches in diameter in the centre, and about the same distance from the top, is the true nest, where the eggs are deposited on their ends, side by side in a circle, the usual number of eggs being about twelve. During the laying season the nest is left slightly hollow in the middle, which leads into it any rain that falls, thereby retarding the fermentation of the vegetable matter until the laying is finished, when the nest is heaped into a conical shape. The parent birds watch the nest to repair any damage that it may sustain during incubation, but do not assist the young ones to escape from it. Many of the nests must have been occupied for generations, as but few deserted ones are found.

When the hunter is a little rested after returning to his lodge, he proceeds to cook his game, an operation in which he takes great pride. If the game be small, the hot embers with a few green leaves scattered over them will afford means; if small fish, green grass is substituted for the leaves, and a few minutes suffice for cooking them to perfection. But if the game be large, an old cooking place or oven is resorted to, fire is made in a little hollow, and some of the pieces of baked clay which are lying about are placed upon it. When these are sufficiently heated, the hollow is cleared of the embers, and a little grass or a few leaves are strewed over it, upon which the game is laid. More leaves or grass with the hot pieces of clay and embers are placed upon it, and the whole is covered with earth. These cooking places or ovens are generally on the banks of rivers or lagoons, and are numerous throughout the country; some of them, where fuel is very scarce, are about twenty yards across and five feet high, which, at their apparent rate of increase of size, must have been many centuries in accumulating.

After a day of successful hunting, the evening is devoted to a very rude description of concert; men and women sing, the former accompanying themselves with the clashing of two pieces of hard wood, about eight inches long, held lightly between the fingers, and the women by beating upon a tightly folded opossum rug—a rude substitute for a drum. The sharp clash of the wood, softened by the drumming, accompanied by a wild air, make a monotonous, but as they keep excellent time a not uninteresting music, when heard at a little distance in the stillness of night. The following day is employed in preparing skins, or making spears, boomerangs, nets, or whatever the individual or his part of the country excels in, for their own use, or for presents or barter at the next corroboree; the females busy themselves in making net-bags or net-bands, which are worn around the head by both sexes, or rush baskets, which are strong and neatly finished, or mats for collecting leerp, a little scale-like manna which exudes from, and adheres to, the leaf of the young mallee; this is sometimes gathered in considerable quantities, and is drunk dissolved in water.

Corroborees take place generally about the period of the new moon, and last three days or nights, messengers being sent to the neighbouring tribes to arrange the time and place of meeting, and also to those at a greater distance, perhaps sixty miles, to invite them to come. A messenger goes on his mission with as great an air of importance as though a people's destiny depended on the result; a hand-spear, a wummera, and a tomahawk forming his equipments. Previous to assembly, great efforts are made to prepare articles for presents or exchange, and to collect food, as it is not probable that sufficient game will be found on the spot to support so many persons. As the people come near the rendezvous, they send up columns of smoke to give notice of their approach.

In the meeting of strangers great reserve is displayed by the men: the contrary is, however, the case with the females, they speak together at once, although in a subdued tone. The men at first rather avoid than look at or speak to each other, and it is not until they have been seated near together some time that one in a very low voice makes of the other some kind inquiry; then by degrees mutual inquiries break down the barrier of reserve, until one invites the other to sit at his fire, when conversation is unrestrained.

Pyrenees, whose rounded heights closed the view. On the low hills on either side, amongst the shrubby trees, the belligerent tribes, about a hundred men in number, took up their respective positions, with loud shouts of defiance, and in constant motion, to enable them the more readily to avoid the missiles of their adversaries. Near the men, and round the upper part of the valley, the women were stationed in little groups. Suddenly the tribe on one side rushed in an irregular line down the hill, and, after having discharged their boomerangs, which trundled along the ground like hoops, up the hill of their opponents, instantly retreated to their partial cover. The other tribe then rushed down their hill, and discharged their boomerangs in the same manner at the retreating body; again the first tribe assault, and again their opponents repel it, every man vigorously leaping and shouting. While the young women collected the boomerangs and carried them to the men, occasionally exhorting them or fighting amongst themselves with their poles, the old women screamed and threw dust into the air, clasping their hands high over head, and quivering in every limb as it fell upon them. At length the men on either side seized their leeowils and mulkas, and rushed into the valley to meet each other hand to hand, fighting as with battle-axe and shield. In a brief space of time, a few bruises, scratches, and broken fingers, satisfy the contending parties, and all appear friends again.

When death visits a tribe there is great weeping and lamentation amongst the women, the elder portion of whom lacerate their temples with their nails; which they also do on all occasions of their friends being in pain or trouble. As the big tears course each other down their cheeks, the blood may sometimes be seen trickling from their temples. The parents of the deceased lacerate themselves fearfully, especially if it be an only son whose loss they deplore. The father beats and cuts his head with a tomahawk until he utters bitter groans. The mother sits by the fire and burns her breasts and abdomen with a small fire-stick till she wails with pain; then she replaces the stick in the fire, to use again when the pain is less severe. This continues for hours daily, until the time of lamentation is completed; sometimes the burns thus inflicted are so severe as to cause death. The relatives of the deceased cover their heads and the upper part of their faces with a white talcy clay, which is worn during the time of mourning; and widows, in some instances, have the hair first cut off with a little fire-stick close to the head, by the doctor or priest, before they assume this badge of woe.

When a person dies of a loathsome disease, the body is burned; while that of a young person, whose death is attributable to a different cause, is put into a tree to decay. The bones are afterwards collected and buried, the mother sometimes securing the small bones of the legs, to wear round her neck as a memorial. Persons of matured life, especially old men and doctors, are buried with much ceremony. The grave is made in a picturesque spot, to which the body is borne by the relatives; and with it are interred the weapons and other articles belonging to the deceased. The grass is cleared away around the grave for about a yard at each side, and eight yards at each end, in the form of a canoe, and the ground carefully swept daily by the female relatives; and for a time a small fire is made every night at the foot of the grave. If the person were much respected, a little covering of boughs or bark upon four supports is placed over it, and the canoe-shaped space neatly fenced with stakes.

All deaths from natural causes are attributed to the machinations of enemies, who are supposed to have sought for and burnt the excrement of the intended victim, which, according to the general belief, causes a gradual wasting away. The relatives, therefore, watch the struggling feet of the dying person, as they point in the direction whence the injury is thought to come, and serve as a guide to the spot where it should be avenged. This is the duty of the nearest male relative; should he fail in its execution, it will ever be to him a reproach, although other relatives may have avenged the death. If the deceased were a chief, then the duty devolves upon the tribe. Chosen men are sent in the direction indicated, who kill the first persons they meet, whether men, women, or children; and the more lives that are sacrificed, the greater is the honour to the dead. The dead are very rarely spoken of, and then never by name, but in a subdued voice, as the lost one, or the poor fellow that is no more; to speak of them by name would, it is supposed, excite the malignity of Couit-gil, the spirit of the departed, which hovers upon the earth for a time, and ultimately goes towards the setting sun.

The tribes in the neighbourhood of Fiery Creek have two other malignant spirits—Neulam-kurrk, the evil spirit which inhabits craters and caves, and in the form of an old woman steals children and eats them; and Colbumatuan-kurrk, the spirit of storms, which kills or injures people by throwing limbs of trees upon them or in their way for them to fall against at night. They have also a good spirit named Barnbungil, who is the reliever of pain.

Neilloan (Lyra), a Loan flying (Leipoa ocellata). The mother of Totyarguil, and discoverer of the loan eggs, which knowledge she imparted to the aborigines. When the loan eggs are coming into season on earth, they are going out of season with her. When she sets with the sun the loan eggs are in season.

Totyarguil (Aquilla). The star on either side is his wife. He was the son of Neilloan, and was, while bathing, killed by a bunyip, his remains were afterwards rescued by his uncle, Collenbitchick.

Although the bunyip appears to be an imaginary creature, yet it is feared by every one, and is described as having a head and neck like an emu, and as inhabiting deep holes in rivers and lakes, where it kills persons who venture therein.

Karick Karick (the two stars in the end of the tail of Scorpio). A male and female falcon.

Berm-berm-gl (two large stars in the fore legs of Centaurus). Two brothers noted for their courage and destructiveness, who spear and kill Tchin-gal. The eastern stars of Crux are the points of the spears that have passed through him, the one at the foot through his neck, and that in the arm through his back.

Tchin-gal (the dark space between the fore legs of Centaurus and Crux) Emu. Who pursues Bunya until he takes refuge in a tree, and who is afterwards killed by Berm-berm-gl.

Bunya, (star in the head of Crux) Opossum. Who is pursued by Tchin-gal, and who, in his fright, lays his spears at the foot of a tree and runs up it for safety. For such cowardice he became an opossum.

Tourt-chinboiong-gherra (Coma Berenices). A flock of small birds drinking rain-water, which has lodged in a fork of a tree.

Kourt-chin (Magellan Clouds). The larger cloud a male, and the lesser cloud a female native companion (Grus Australasianus).

War-ring (Galaxy). The smoke of the fires of the Nurrumbung-uttias. Another account is, that only a part of the galaxy is the smoke of the fires of the Nurrumbung-uttias, and that the other part is two Mindii, enormous snakes which made the Murray (Millee). The existing Mindii are about eighteen feet long.

Kulkun-bulla (the stars in the belt and scabbard of Orion). A number of young men dancing. (A corroboree.)

Larnan-kurrk (Pleiades). A group of young women playing to Kulkun-bulla.

Ghellar-lec (Aldebaran), Rose Cockatoo, (Cacatue Leadbeateri). An old man chanting, and beating time to Kulkun-bulla and Larnan-kurrk.

Ware-pil (Sirius), Male Eagle. A chief of the Nurrumbung-uttias, and brother to War.

Collow-gullouric Ware-pil (Rigel), Female Eagle. Wife of Ware-pil.

Won (Corona). A boomerang thrown by Totyarguil.

Weet-kurrk (Star in Boötes, west of Arcturus). Daughter of Marpean-kurrk.

War (Canopus), Male Crow. The brother of Ware-pil, and the first to bring fire from (tyrille) space, and give it to the aborigines, before which they were without it.

Collow-gullouric War (a large red star in Rober Caroli, marked 966), Female Crow. Wife of War. All the small stars around her are her children.

Yerrer-det-kurrk (Achernar). Nalwin-kurrk, or mother of Totyarguil's wives.

Otchocut (Delphinus). Great Fish.

Collen-bitchick (double star in the head of Capricornus); a large ant. Uncle to Totyarguil, and rescuer of his remains from the Bunyip. The double star is his fingers feeling for the bank of the river.

Yurree (Castor), Wanjel (Pollux). Two young men that pursue Purra, and kill him at the commencement of the great heat; and Coonar-toorung (Mirage) is the smoke of the fire by which they roast him. When their smoke is gone weeit (autumn) begins.

Purra (Capella); Kangaroo. Who is pursued and killed by Yurree and Wanjel.

Unurgunite (a small star marked fifth magnitude, 22, between two larger ones, in the body of Canis Major). He fights Mityan and makes him run away for having tried to induce one of Unurgunite's wives to elope with him; the star on either side of Unurgunite is his wife, that farthest from him is the object of Mityan's affections.

The tribes inhabiting the country extending from Swan Hill to Mount Franklin have similar names and mythological representations for the stars to those here described. The language of the aborigines varies very much, and although they generally speak two or three dialects, they cannot understand a person that comes from a great distance. Taking the name represented by lodge, as an example of such variations, at Melbourne it is called mia-mia, at the Fiery Creek Iyaeu, and at Mount Gambier oolah. Over a considerable tract of country man is called coolee, and woman bair-kurrk.