

THE ESSENTIAL AUSTRALIAN.¹

IT is not too much to say that the publication in 1899 of "The Native Tribes of Central Australia" marked an epoch in anthropological research. A lengthy residence amongst savages, who still lived in their original isolation, uncontaminated by European influences, resulted in a remarkable study of a scientific accuracy and completeness hitherto unknown. The authors, both competent ethnologists, the one a distinguished biologist, the other a protector of aborigines, were fortunate in their subject, which proved to be the most interesting section of that most interesting of all primitive peoples, the Australian race. Peculiarities of organisation and belief were revealed which threw new light on many old questions, and reversed many an old theory. In the present work Messrs. Spencer and Gillen supply a sequel to the earlier volume, completing their study of the tribes of the centre by an account of those occupying the country between the Macdonnell Ranges and the Gulf of Carpentaria. The main result is to show a fundamental agreement in important characters between all the central tribes, and the authors repeat their previous conclusion that "the central tribes which for long ages have been shielded by their geographical isolation from external influences, have retained the most primitive form of customs and beliefs." The main features of the Arunta and Urabunna tribes are recapitulated, and we are thus enabled to study comparatively the whole series. Several points in the earlier work are cleared up, and some answer to objections is given by the way. As before, the photographs are excellent and numerous. The new volume possesses the same unique character and value which were conspicuous in "The Native Tribes."

The new types of aborigines present a high average of physical development, but strike one as being less prepossessing in aspect than the Arunta. There are none of the faces which in the other book reminded one of English bishops and fellows of the Royal Society. We are struck by the great number of dialects, each of which has varieties, a fact which must have rendered the task of the investigators very difficult, were it not the case that every blackfellow is, like Ennius, the master of two languages besides his own. As before, the authors point out many fallacies in popular works. For instance, "nothing could be further from the truth" than the notion that "the various tribes were in a state of constant hostility." Again, "there is no such thing as the acquisition of fresh territory"; the blackfellow holds "not only that his country is his by inheritance, but that it would be of no use to anyone else, nor would any other people's country be any use to him." There are no chiefs or head-men; the old men constitute an informal council, which punishes crime, chiefly "bone-giving" and the breaking of marriage-laws, organises the ceremonies, and from time to time inaugurates sound reforms. There is no haranguing of the meeting, which in its etiquette and procedure is the replica

¹ "The Northern Tribes of Central Australia." By Baldwin Spencer, M.A., F.R.S., sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, Professor of Biology in the University of Melbourne, and F. J. Gillen, Special Magistrate and Sub-Protector of Aborigines, South Australia. Pp. xxv+784; 2 plates, map, 315 figures. (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1904.) Price 21s. net.

of an English committee. "As to the capture of women," the authors state, "we have never in any of these central tribes met with any such thing. . . . What looks like a capture to the casual observer is in reality an elopement, in which the woman is an aiding and abetting party." A good instance this of the necessity of trained and sympathetic inquiry, going far to indicate that many of the old and still accepted theories of primitive culture may be founded on the sands of ignorant and prejudiced mal-observation.

A valuable feature of this, as of the previous work, is the way in which the daily life of the native is visualised for the reader, and in this connection there are two facts which receive especial emphasis. Before initiation, which takes place about the age of fourteen, the boy is free; after this ceremony his life is regulated for him, and is sharply divided into two spheres, the ordinary daily round of food-getting and corroborees, and "what gradually becomes of greater and greater importance to him, the portion of his life devoted to matters of a sacred or secret nature. As he grows older he takes an increasing share in these, until finally



FIG. 1.—Ceremony of Alkira-Kiuma. Arunta tribe. Throwing the novice up into the air.

this side of his life occupies by far the greater part of his thoughts. The sacred ceremonies which appear very trivial matters to the white man, are most serious matters to him." They are connected with the Great Ancestors of the Alcheringa, "the dream-time," and he believes that his spirit will after death be in communion with them. "It is astonishing how large a part of a native's life is occupied with the performance of these ceremonies, the enacting of which extends sometimes over the whole of two or three months, during which time one or more will be performed daily." In one tribe there is the unique case of a ceremony performed to promote the physical and mental development of the boys and girls. Sometimes a man will, in a similar fashion, induce his bride-elect to grow, or a father will assist the development of his unborn child. In the second place, the food-supply is organised on a most effective system by the cooperation of the totemic groups. "If I am a kangaroo man, then I provide kangaroo flesh for emu men, and in return I expect them to

provide me with a supply of emu flesh and eggs, and so on right through all of the totems. . . . It is the duty of every one to supply certain other older people with food, and this they do cheerfully and ungrudgingly. In this way and in accordance with the needs and conditions of the community, these savages have long ago settled the question of an old-age pension, or rather they have rendered any such thing quite unnecessary."

The remarkable marriage-systems of the Arunta and Urabunna are repeated with varying gradations right through the central tribes. As to the "group-marriage" of the Urabunna, the authors now state explicitly that the supernumerary husbands and wives are called *Piraungaru*, as amongst the Dieri. The present writer once compared the facts with Mr. Howitt's evidence as to the Dieri custom. The authors repeat with insistence that "individual marriage does not exist either in name or in practice amongst the Urabunna tribe." Again, "this state of affairs has nothing whatever to do with polygamy any more than it has with polyandry," a statement which I confess

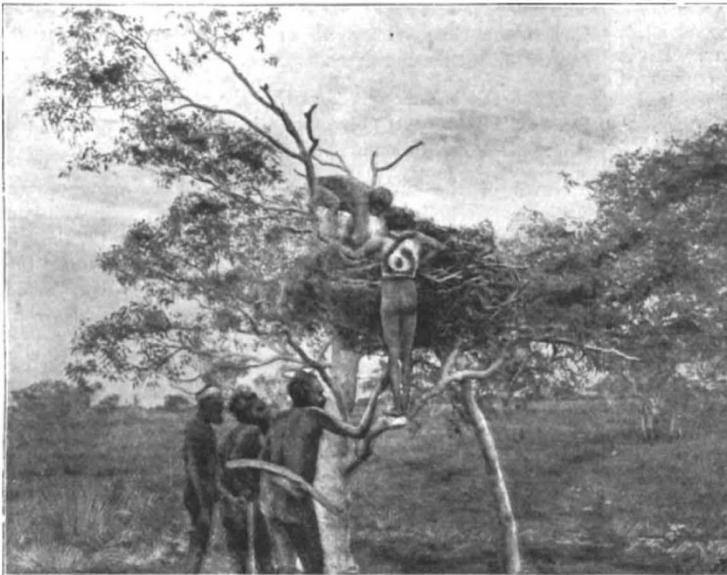


FIG. 2.—Visit to tree grave at sunrise, a few days after the death of a man, to try and discover some clue to the supposed murderer. Warramunga tribe. The men in the tree are examining the body.

I do not understand. They add that this group-marriage is not abnormal, because a gradation to individual marriage can be traced among the other tribes; but what we suggest is that group-marriage is abnormal for humanity as a whole. As to the connection of totemism with the bisectonal marriage-system, their conclusion for these tribes is important:—"the two systems have become associated together in various ways in different tribes, but are perfectly distinct from one another in origin and significance." The account of relationships is fuller than before. New facts as to the custom of exchanging wives are given, and in particular the account of the elaborate Fire Ceremony of the Warramunga, a typical Saturnalia, proves that one object at least of these primitive "bursts," in which everything is topsy-turvy and goes by opposites, is, as the present writer had suggested, to promote harmony and union, "to make every one good-tempered and kindly disposed."

Two remarkable beliefs, which were among the new facts brought to light by the previous work, are found to prevail right through the tribes. These are the

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belief that each individual is the reincarnation of an ancestor, and the queer notion, difficult to regard as absolute, that the intercourse of the sexes has *nothing to do* with conception. The Urabunna and Warramunga systems necessitate that in each successive reincarnation the spirit-child changes its sex, its totem, and its moiety. There are curious folk-tales, in one of which a man propagates himself by fission, in another by a sort of budding; the hero of another shakes himself, whereupon children emanate from his muscles. We find new "totems," such as darkness, "laughing boy," and "full-grown man," which will give pause to framers of definitions of this very comprehensive term. *Intichiuma* ceremonies are actually performed by the Kaitish to increase the supply of flies and mosquitoes! Further interesting details are given as to those interesting articles, the *Churinga*, or sacred bull-roarers; in one case they are used to effect moral amelioration—to lessen a man's appetite and to make him willing to share his food with others, he is rubbed and prodded violently in the stomach with a heavy stone *churinga*. One incident of the initiation of

young men among the Urabunna is a sort of tossing in the blanket—without the blanket; the patient is smacked as he comes down to a chorus of "I will teach you to give me some meat." Everyone here is a worker of magic. Husbands and wives are obtained by its means; the charms of the fair sex are literally "charms." A popular cure for head-ache or stomach-ache is to wear your wife's bonnet or its native equivalent. Among these tribes, as also shown in the earlier work, magic practically takes the place of religion. The Central Australian is a professing atheist; at initiation he learns that "the spirit creature whom up to that time as a boy he has regarded as all powerful is merely a myth, and that such a being does not really exist, and is only an invention of the men to frighten the women and children." In this connection one wonders if the Central Australian really represents a more primitive stage of culture than other savages.

A very full description is given of the tools and implements used by the natives, and of their decorative art. A remarkable application of the latter is to be found in the ground-drawings, showing considerable power of design, which are made for the numerous ceremonies.

If there is any defect in this fine monument of anthropological science, it is perhaps one that is due to its chief merit—the objective character of the study; one desiderates further analysis of the psychology of the blackfellow.

Thanks to investigators like Howitt, Fison, Roth, and Spencer and Gillen, we know the Australian of the east and centre better than any savage in the world, and we may hope that our authors will be able, before it is too late, to crown their work, already invaluable, by a study of the western districts, at present a *terra incognita*.

ERNEST CRAWLEY.

THE WIRELESS TELEGRAPHY BILL.

A MEMORANDUM explanatory of the Wireless Telegraphy Bill which was introduced by Lord Stanley, the Postmaster-General, has been issued as a parliamentary paper. We have already referred to the