

*On the Manners and Customs of the Aborigines of the
Lower Murray and Darling, by*

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It is much to be regretted that many of our fellow-colonists who have had ample opportunities for observing the aboriginal inhabitants of Australia, have never made an attempt to record the manners and habits of a people now without a doubt upon the verge of extinction: and as every observation—be it apparently ever so trifling—will become of greater interest from year to year, I may be held excused if I come before you to-day with some *bonâ-fide* notes relating to the Aborigines of the Lower Murray and Darling. Nearly eight years have passed since they were made, and many of the natives, then in the prime of life, have disappeared already, and but few of them will be remembered by the settlers who now occupy their hunting grounds.

Unlike the American Indian, who slowly retreated before the settler, the Australian clung to the soil upon which he was born, but he did not become civilised; he tried to eke out an existence, feeding upon his Kangaroos and Emus, and occasionally interfering with the squatters' stock: but finding that he could not do so with impunity, he came to terms, bartered his opossum rug for blankets; his game for flour, beef, or mutton; his services as a shepherd or stock-rider for other luxuries of civilised life; and at last he became dependent for almost everything upon the occupant of his own domain. The consequence of all this is obvious. A native once used to flour, tea, sugar, and tobacco, can hardly exist without them; hence very few independent tribes remain within the settled districts, and the younger members of them have almost forgotten the vegetables or the game upon which their fathers once feasted.

If these people did not retreat before the white man it was not their fault; they have only the alternative of making a compromise with the settler, or of fighting the next tribe they come in contact with; and generally they adopted the first—they remained upon the soil which had given them food for so many years, took to rum and tobacco, sacrificed their wives and daughters to the white man (if a free offer may be called a sacrifice), and at last, almost ceased to increase in numbers as the women became either barren or produced a weak half-caste offspring, who were not fit to endure the same privations, or obtain their food in the same ingenious manner as their black brethren.

The Aboriginal population of Victoria in 1847 amounted to about 5000; in 1858, shortly after these notes had been taken, their number had been reduced to 1768, men, women, and children; and if they have decreased at the same rate to the present day there will scarcely be a thousand souls left.

When I started from Melbourne, in October 1857, for the Lower Murray, I counted the number of natives who visited our camp at every station, and the following is the result, the average distance being about 25 or 30 miles from post to post. Between Melbourne and Spring Plains—about 70 miles—no native was observed.

Apple's Hotel	...	...	...	...	...	...	8
Campaspe River	...	...	...	...	...	...	15
Echuca	...	...	...	...	...	...	35
Maiden's Station	...	...	...	...	...	...	8
Gardiner's Station, (Gunbower Creek)	...	...	...	...	...	...	45
Gardiner's Out-Station	...	...	...	...	...	...	12
Campbell's Station	...	...	...	...	...	...	18
Loddon Junction	...	...	...	...	...	...	23
Reedy Lake	...	...	...	...	...	...	10
Lake Boga	...	...	...	...	...	...	6
Marrapit River	...	...	...	...	...	...	14
Swan Hill	...	...	...	...	...	...	18
Tintindyre	...	...	...	...	...	...	13
Coghill's Station	...	...	...	...	...	...	7
Hamilton's Station, and Murrumbidgee Junction	...	...	...	...	...	...	22

Lagoon, near Junction	... ..	12
M'Callum's, and Grant's Station	... ..	31
Euston (including native police)	... ..	40
Half-way Lagoon	... ..	29
Kilkinie	... ..	11
M'Grath's Station	... ..	7
Jamieson's Station, (Milldura), and Williams's Station, (Gall Gall)	... ..	35
Darling Junction...	... ..	35

which, in round numbers, would amount to about 400 souls.

Between Melbourne and the Campaspe, the natives have very much degenerated, they were, in fact, represented by a few old men and decrepit women, and two or three diseased wretched children; but, nearing the Murray, their condition appeared to improve, and at Gunbower Creek they were found in considerable numbers, most of the men fine stalwart fellows, some more than six feet and one nearly seven feet in height.

Fishes, crayfish, the eggs of tortoises, ducks, emus, the mallee hen, and the black swan, appeared to be their principal food at that time, they were therefore tolerably independent and remarkably lazy as I thought, though on consideration it appeared to me that their philosophy was quite correct; why should they exert themselves? They did not lay in stores, and many of their viands being of a perishable nature, and to be had almost every day, there was no reason why they should work like their civilised brethren; there are only two beings which appeared great fools in their eyes, namely a white man and a working bullock.

My stay at Gunbower Creek was not of sufficient duration to study the manners and habits of these people; the men all carried guns (some very queer looking fowling pieces), they were all tolerably good shots, but when trusted with ammunition would invariably come home empty handed, though their own camp fires seemed to be well supplied with a variety of game.

After a while, many of the smaller animals were bartered for tobacco and flour, but in not one instance could they be induced to kill a bat; they even asked, when I had captured one of these creatures alive in the tent, to let it go, as it was "brother belonging to blackfellow."

They told me that if it was killed, one of their lubras would be sure to die in consequence. They had their corobbories of a moonlight night, keeping our party awake with monotonous songs, and once they even had a sort of quarrel, and in consequence a fight—a woman, as usual, being at the bottom of it—but after all nobody was hurt, and I missed a good opportunity of observing their burial rites.

There were, however, a few graves in the neighbourhood of Mr. Gardiner's station, in a thick pine scrub, enclosed by a rude brush fence, and covered with large pieces of cork. They appeared neglected, and were much more rude in shape than the graves subsequently encountered farther down the river. The settlers treated the poor blacks invariably with great kindness, in return for which they would look after the squatters' property with a keen eye. They would never allow the men to destroy any old fences or huts for the sake of a few dry slabs or a piece of bark; and if no heed was taken of their remonstrances, would invariably report it at the next station. If their watchful eyes observed the tracks of a few stray sheep, they immediately altered their course, and took me miles out of my road to—as it appeared—no purpose whatever, until the stragglers were overtaken, and safely delivered at the head-station.

Like all the other tribes they would share their food with each other, and if out hunting, and having too many followers for the few pounds of flour and tea with which we started, it was frequently found necessary to starve part of the garrison, by making the natives who accompanied us, eat their rations before our eyes, so that the idle camp followers were compelled to look after opossums, and leave us alone.

Following the course of the Murray, I noticed about 18 or 20 natives encamped near Campbell's Station, one of them a remarkable character, being an aged woman in good condition, with a large white beard; the natives at this place appeared to subsist principally upon fish, of which 3 or 4 kinds including the Murray Cod (*Oligorus macquariensis*), were roasting on their camp fires.

At the Loddon Junction more natives were observed, all armed with fishing spears, and freely offering their women for a small number of hooks and lines.

At Reedy Lake, about ten men and women were noticed, and at Lake Boga, six; the natives who visited the camp at Lake Boga were remarkable on account of their powers of mimicry, and the good English they spoke; all had been under the tuition of the Moravian Missionaries, and one appeared to make a livelihood by offering to preach like one of them; he had a way of his own of saying home truths, like "white-fellow always pray give it daily bread, but bail give it damper." It appears that the Moravian Missionaries had made an attempt to teach the natives agriculture, but I fear with little success. A few small plots of ground enclosed with a brush fence, and overgrown with weeds, were all that was left of these "native gardens," to which their owners pointed with considerable pride.

In this part of the country where extensive reed beds are of common occurrence, the natives live for several months during the year on "Typha roots," or Wongal (*Typha Shuttleworthii*); at a certain period, I believe January or February to be the months, the women enter these swamps, take up the roots of these reeds, and carry them in large bundles to their camp; the roots thus collected are about a foot to eighteen inches in length, and they contain besides a small quantity of saccharine matter, a considerable quantity of fibre. The roots are roasted in a hollow made into the ground, and either consumed hot or taken as a sort of provision upon hunting excursions; they are at the best but a miserable apology for flour, and I almost believe that it was more on account of the tough fibre thus obtained that these roots are made an article of food.

As soon as a sufficient quantity of "Wongal" had been roasted, the whole tribes settled around the improvised oven, every body chewing the roots most vigorously; the lumps of rejected fibre were afterwards collected by the women, and spun into threads from which their fishing-nets and other domestic utensils were manufactured, these nets forming the staple article of barter between the tribes inhabiting the reed-beds and those parts where no Wongal was produced. If we take into consideration the large nets for catching water-fowl in use, it is indeed astonishing how great the perseverance of these people (and how sound their teeth) must have been, and it is not to be

wondered at that the possession of one of these nets has always been considered to be a sort of fortune to its owner.

At the present time no more fishing-nets of Wongal fibre are manufactured, as the natives barter twine from the settlers instead.

Between Lake Boga and the Junction of the Murrumbidgee, some sixty or seventy natives were observed encamped in small lots near the river or lagoons, most of them occupied with fishing. We passed several graves, the last near Coghill's Station, of the simple form noticed at Gunbower Creek, whilst a little farther on a regular hut had been erected over the departed native; and at Hamilton's Station were two graves of this description, in a very good state of preservation. The form of these sepulchres changed again soon, being, instead of bark, covered with grass and reeds; a fishing net generally enclosing the whole fabric.

Nearly all the trees along the river-bank showed more or less traces of the presence at one time of a large number of natives: square pieces of bark for drying their opossum skins upon had been cut, often to the height of 20 feet above the ground; there were also many signs upon these trees where canoes of great dimensions had once been removed, whilst fresh cuttings of this kind rarely occurred.

It may be of interest to give a short description of the manner in which a canoe is manufactured:—

The tree selected is generally the species of *Eucalyptus*, known to the settlers as "*Flooded Gum*," by which the river banks from Swan Hill to the Darling Junction are invariably fringed; the trunk must be free from branches or knots, and, if possible, slightly bent; having found a suitable tree of this kind, a large forked branch is cut, and the tree being jammed between, it serves the native as a sort of ladder; he begins by making two incisions which at first run parallel to each other, and then closing more and more join at the ends, the whole having the form of an elongate shield. The outer bark is then removed sufficiently to permit the introduction of a number of flattened sticks of tough wood, each about a quarter of an inch thick; these sticks are wedged under the piece of bark, which is to form the canoe; they

bend easily, and soon loosen it from the trunk. With a couple of grass-ropes around the bark, it is then allowed to slide down, and is put upon the stocks in a regular way. Dry leaves, grass, and small branches, having been collected and put into the still flat piece of bark, they are fired, and the sides soon begin to turn up; when sufficiently bent, 3 or 4 sticks are introduced, to prevent the bark from curling any more; accidental cracks or holes in the canoe are filled up with clay from the river-bank, and the boat is ready for use.

These canoes are generally propelled with long elastic spears, and considerable progress is made on smooth water, as lakes or lagoons; but to steer the frail bark dead against the stream in such a river as the Murray is almost impossible; when going up stream, the natives keep close alongside the river banks, where the current is less, but they never travel long distances up the river, but frequently visit friendly tribes by going overland, and having manufactured a canoe, they drift down the stream, back to their own hunting grounds.

A supply of clay is always kept in these canoes, and often when the bark is not of sufficient depth, a clay rim or dam is raised on both ends, to prevent the water from coming in; being all good swimmers, the natives appear very careless with their frail craft, and if she sinks, which is however very seldom the case, they quietly swim ashore and build another. To sit perfectly quiet is the first rule, balance yourself well, keep baling out any water which may run in, and trust to the native who propels the boat; the least motion from one side to the other suffices to fill and sink it, there being seldom more than about an inch of board. Being at home in the water, like Newfoundland dogs, they appear to think that every white man who trusts himself to their bark canoes, must necessarily be the same, and if half-a-dozen men are willing to cross the river at once, the natives have generally no opposition to offer, and would almost as soon see some of their passengers drowned as cross the river twice.

When out fishing at night, they have a small fire burning in the bow of the canoe, which is for that purpose covered with clay; some of the fishes are attracted hereby, and many of

them speared. A loop of grass-rope, or green hide, attached to the side of the canoe, through which the spear is run into the bottom of the river, answers the purpose of an anchor.

Passing farther down the Murray, the natives increased in numbers, and at a lagoon near Kilkine, we found some 50 or 60 of them assembled for the purpose of "making young men;" these wretched youths being passed through various ordeals, one of which was to mount the candidate upon the shoulders of the biggest man in the tribe, to run round the camp fires with him, all the rest following with hideous noises, and to deposit him without as much as a shirt on, in some part of the scrub. Five or six of them passed the night there, shivering and hungry, until released by the men the next morning, and introduced to the adults of the tribe as "men." I do not think that these ceremonies were gone through in the orthodox style, and the youths did not appear to believe in them at all; they assured me they only submitted because of their rights hereafter to take a lubra unto themselves.

Both men and women were well made, with highly intelligent countenances; but, except the young girls, none of them wore any covering whatever. When the men approached at the first interview, they wore two or three feathers of the White Cockatoo in their hair—a sign of their being messengers of peace,—and two of them who accompanied our party to the Darling Junction, never removed these feathers as long as they were upon the hunting grounds of another tribe.

On no occasion did I notice any of the natives to travel at night, and whenever noises were heard, for which they could not account, they were invariably put down to the credit of Devil-Devil, and no promise whatever could induce them to leave their fires.

A few miles from Milldura, at a place called Mondellemin by the natives, a permanent camp was established, and in a few days some twenty of them, including men, women, and children, were assembled near our huts; they could not at first understand what brought us there, but when we purchased some of the native animals captured by them, they ever after brought in a good supply

and became our permanent huntsmen. The boys would go out to collect insects, the women to look for small mammals, and the men looking for the larger game; they would try their best to please, and obtain the reward offered for some of the more rare creatures, but not succeeding, they would as quickly try to pass off some common animal as the one which we were in want of.

Being very anxious to obtain Mitchell's tail-less *Choeropus* (*Choeropus ecaudatus*) high rewards were offered, though in vain; the cunning natives, not succeeding in finding the animal required, were in the habit of bringing any number of the common bandicoot, (*Perameles obesula*) with the tail screwed out.

Altogether they became very useful, and very much attached to us, (as long as our flour bags lasted, at least); but whenever the stock of flour diminished, they would break up their camps, and pay visits at the neighbouring stations; returning as quick as possible when they heard that a steamer had arrived with fresh supplies. At one time, when about fifty bags were in store, I observed two natives trying to count them; but, their numerals being limited to one and two, this became rather a difficult task; *rangul* means two, and *meta* one, so that *rangul*, *rangul*, *meta* is equivalent to five, and so on ad infinitum; of course, to count *fifty* in this fashion was too much for them, so informing the tribe that there were *thousands* of flour bags in the store, they returned shortly after, with a stick, into which they made a notch for every bag, keeping henceforth as good an account as the storeman. Nothing could keep them near the camp, or induce them to exert themselves in hunting, except seeing a good supply of flour on hand; and when some two months before our return to Melbourne, the stock became very low, and I feared to lose the natives, they were completely out-manœuvred; as I filled the empty bags with sand during the night, and piled them up with the rest.

Never did I behold such astonished faces as the natives showed on the next morning; they examined the ground for miles, looking for dray tracks, and as no steamer had passed, could not account for the flour thus arrived, and as usual, put it down to the agency of "Devil-Devil."

I have often tried to find out if they had any ideas of religion, but without success; I know that the younger children

often learn to read and to write, and I believe that Mr. Goodwin, of Yelta, has had some very successful scholars, but I do not think that the adults ever understood the principles of Christianity.

Once I met old Jacob, a Darling chief, in Mr. Goodwin's house, intensely looking at a colored print, representing our Lord as the "Good Shepherd," with a lamb upon his shoulders. Jacob addressed me in his quaint way of—"make a light! name belonging to that one Shepherd?"

I tried to explain the meaning of the picture, but to no purpose, and all I got out of poor Jacob was:—"bail shepherd belonging to this country! never see him carry lamb on his shoulders, he always leave him along the bush." Taking the print literally, I do not think Jacob was far wrong.

The natives living near Mr. Goodwin's place were much more comfortable in many respects than any of the tribes seen before; they could always count upon a certain price in the shape of flour, tea, and sugar, for any work performed; they lived in closed sort of huts, which had somewhat of a permanent character; but I have reason to believe that all the good examples of Mr. Goodwin and his assistant, were counteracted by the presence of a lot of hard-drinking and hard-swearing bushmen at the Darling Junction public-house, opposite.

Here, at Yelta, or rather on the New South Wales side of the River, the natives had always assembled in large numbers for the purpose of feasting upon fish and bartering their famous Myall-spears for reeds, Wongal-twine, and nets the produce of other parts of the country; in olden times no doubt their stone hatchets were exchanged in a similar manner, as from Gunbower Creek to the Darling Junction there is not a stone to be met with the size of a man's fist. I have been told that the green stone, serpentine, or jade tomahawks used by the natives, were obtained at Mount Macedon, and that a certain locality on the side of the mount had been considered neutral ground by the neighbouring tribes, who went there for the purpose of obtaining suitable material for their weapons.

About this time of the year, in the month of July, a similar gathering had taken place; and one night I visited the camp,

accompanied by Mr. Goodwin. There was no moon when we crossed the river, and following our guide, we soon found ourselves in the midst of about two hundred natives, stretched around their camp-fires, which formed a semi-circle, the middle being occupied by "old Jacob," the famous chief, who appeared to keep them merry by telling a number of tales; all were busy except Jacob. Some tried to straighten young shoots of the Myall, by heating them in the ashes, and then bending the wood into shape—keeping their feet and the whole weight of their body upon it; others were occupied knitting nets, using the same instrument as our fishermen do, and working with their hands and feet; the women were cooking fish, of which a large supply had been obtained during the day,—carefully reserving the taboo'd fish called Manor, for the use of the aged, no youth or lass being permitted to partake of it;—carving their waddies, or preparing opossums' skins for their rugs, kept others busy, and all this time the sonorous voice of old Jacob could be distinctly heard, and shouts of laughter testified how well the old man's tales were appreciated.

When the moon rose, the men left their occupation, some ascending trees to cut down branches, others painting themselves with gypsum, for the forthcoming corobboree, and shortly after the dance commenced,—performed by some fifty or sixty men, with bushes tied to their ancles. Their ribs, arms, and thigh-bones, were traced with gypsum upon the dark skin, and made them appear as so many skeletons; the women and young girls formed a sort of orchestra, beating opossum rugs, and singing their monotonous airs; all the dancing men, and some of the more aged ones who sat near the women, were provided with two short thick pieces of hardwood, which they beat to the time of the song. All this time one of their "doctors," as he was termed, experimented upon another blackfellow, as it would appear, in trying to deliver him of an immense worm which he seemed to pull out of his patient's mouth; I found afterwards that this worm was part of the intestines of an opossum; they went on enjoying themselves when I left, keeping the dance up until the small hours, and, of course, sleeping far into the day.

The following morning we inspected their fishing gear, which was simple enough. For river or lagoon fishing, when the water is clear, they have a three-pronged spear, with which they strike the fish, either from their canoes or from logs in the water. Sometimes they fish at night, as mentioned before, and then a fire is lit in the bow of the canoe to attract the fish. They also have iron spears, and I was told that they would dive, and take up a position alongside a sunken log, keeping the spear horizontal with the right hand and the big toe, and running it through every fish which came within range; sometimes five or six fish have been speared during the sixty or eighty seconds they remain under the water.

I do not think that they use large nets for fishing in the river, but the women are very expert with hook and line, and with a sort of flat net fixed to a bent stick about 6 or 8 feet in length, similar to a dredge; this, of course, is only fit for shallow lagoons, the outlets of which, when the flood-waters begin to fall, are closed with sticks or basket-work to prevent the fish escaping, thus creating a considerable reserve for the following months.

The principal fishes used as food by the natives are the Murray Cod, (*Oligorus macquariensis*); Silver Perch, (*Lates colonorum*); Cat Fish, (*Copidoglanis tandanus*); and Manor, (*Chatoëssus come*); most of the other species are small; I believe however, that both kinds of Australian Mullet (*Mugil dobula*, and *Mugil compressus*), and another species of so-called Perch inhabit the Murray, and its tributaries.

As I am speaking about nets, I may as well mention their contrivance for catching water-fowl, in particular ducks. Wild ducks are as much prized by the natives as they are with us, and having studied the habits of these shy birds well, they have at last contrived a plan to catch them, which is a complete success. A large net, sometimes 20 feet deep by 100 feet long, is spanned across a creek or river, to the two ends to which a string is fastened, resting upon some branch of a tree, being kept in readiness by two natives, who are posted beneath this tree, and the net completely immersed in the water. Some two or three miles higher up the creek, a party of natives start the birds, which invariably follow the bend of the creek, though

sometimes at a height of a hundred feet or more; as soon as they are nearing the net, another native who is posted in the scrub gives a peculiar whistle—similar to a species of hawk—throwing a flat piece of wood or a boomerang among the startled birds, which immediately stoop to the level of the water's edge; quick as lightning the net is raised, the ducks get entangled in its meshes, and become an easy prey to the women and children, who jump in to secure them.

I have seen from 50 to 100 ducks taken in this manner at a haul. Black Duck, (*Anas superciliosa*); Shovellers, (*Spatula rhynchotis*); Teal, (*Anas punctata*); Pink-eyed or Whistling Ducks, (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*); Wood Ducks, (*Bernicla jubata*); and White-eyed Ducks, (*Nyroca australis*); being the species most common.

Of fresh water crustaceans, we find the large river Cray-fish, (*Potamobius serratus*), distinguished by its spiny back and white pincers, and a species of Prawn, which is frequently eaten raw by the natives.

The large cray-fish is secured in a very simple manner: a canoe is fastened in the stream, and two or three natives paddle with their hands in the water, the great crustacean makes a dart at their fingers with its pincers, and before he finds out his mistake, he is safely landed into the canoe—the pincers being immediately broken off.

Other kinds of food which the lagoons or river supply are tortoises, (*Chelodina*), generally taken during the hot summer days when the water is low, also muscle shells (*Unio*) large mounds of which may be traced upon the river banks at intervals for hundreds of miles.

Most of the natives being supplied with guns, they are able to surprise almost every kind of bird, though they generally shoot water-fowl only. The Emu is still hunted in the primitive style by hunters carrying bushes in their hands, and so trying to steal a march upon the rather stupid bird; as soon as they are within range their spears are thrown and the bird secured.

Fishes, cray-fish, insects, frogs, lizards, snakes, all birds, and the smaller mammals, are generally roasted upon the coals; whilst emus are treated in the following manner:—The feathers

are singed off, and a large hole is made in the ground, filled with leaves, dry branches, &c., the fire being well supplied with fuel for an hour or so; the ashes and embers are then cleaned out, the bottom covered with fresh gum-leaves; the carcase is put upon these, covered over with leaves again, and the whole with earth and lumps of clay (the size of a man's fist) which have previously been heated; a fire is again lit upon the top, and after another hour the bird is done, tasting as sweet as if prepared by the best professed cook.

Of Mammalia which are hunted by the native for the sake of their skins or their flesh, the common opossum (*Phalangista vulpina*), stands first. In the Mallee scrub, where the trees are of stunted growth, these animals are plentiful, and easily secured: whilst upon the river banks, where gum-trees one hundred or two hundred feet in height give them shelter, this is a more laborious task; still even upon the highest tree poor 'Possum is never secure. I have seen one of these nimble blacks after a rainy day, when his stomach called loud for meat, carefully scan every tree along the river bank, until the trace of 'Possums' nails were found in one of the old "gums;" tomahawk in hand, he mounted it, the first branch being about sixty feet above ground; even then, he had to cut through a thick branch, and it was almost dark when he extracted an old opossum, which however, before it could be killed, dropped into the river below; his wife had been watching him, however, and plunging into the stream, she secured their supper for that night.

If nothing is to be had in the shape of meat, the last resource is, in summer time at least, to light a few branches and hunt for frogs, which may also be secured, summer or winter, beneath the bark of the flooded gum trees. Native cats, (*Dasyurus geoffroyi*) all species of rats and mice, and the smaller wallabies, (*Halmaturus*), are also eaten, and some of them obtained almost every day. The large kangaroos (*Macropus major* and *Osphranter rufus*) are generally hunted by a number of men with their dogs, the time chosen being after a heavy shower of rain, when the large animals sink deep into the chalky soil of the Mallee scrub.

After a kangaroo has been killed, the successful hunter secures the kidney fat, which however is very small in quantity, it

is generally attached to a string around the neck, and of course women and children who see this sign rejoice, and bring home the carcass, if it is not too far; or should more than one animal have been slaughtered, the tribe removes for a day or two, to eat the meat on the spot.

A species of burrowing kangaroo-rat, (*Bettongia campestris*) and a sort of bandicoot, (*Peragalea lagotis*), are dug out occasionally.

The kangaroo-rat, called Booming, is common in the scrub, and its burrows often cover a couple of acres of ground: the natives trace the direction of the holes, by inserting long slender twigs, and then sink a shaft, which sometimes requires to be from ten to twelve feet deep; when they labour, they work with a will, and more than once I have noticed a couple of natives to sink three such shafts in a day. A pointed stick to loosen the earth, a sort of scoop to throw it up, or if too deep, to fill a kangaroo skin with it, are all the digging utensils they require.

The burrowing bandicoot, known as Wuirrappur to the natives, is dug up in a similar manner. In fact there is scarcely a living animal from the grub of a large beetle to a whale, which an Australian rejects. The vegetable kingdom does not offer, however, a great variety of food.

One or two herbs,—the Quandong, and a root the size of a radish, are all the vegetables I have ever noticed these people to eat, though the so called "Pigface" (*Mesembryanthemum æquilaterale*), must not be forgotten; it appears to be the only substitute for salt they have, and whenever their women have been out, they invariably return with some bunches of this plant.

Being dependent upon a variety of food which is not always in season, or more plentiful at one time than at another, they lead of course, a wandering life, and on this account do not erect any permanent dwelling. A simple break-wind of gum-branches is all they require, and sometimes a few sheets of bark are stripped to make their huts more comfortable, but beyond this they do not go; these light structures are shifted, or rather turned, should there be a change of wind, or they are left altogether in case the vermin become too troublesome.

Their weapons are just as simple ; a few reed-spears with hardwood ends, a throwing stick, a sort of shield, besides clubs or waddies and boomerangs, comprise the whole of their armoury. The boomerang appears to have been a late introduction, and I have never seen a native on the Murray who made use of it as a defensive weapon.

Their social position is naturally a very low one ; they do not appear to have any idea of a Supreme Being, they possess no religious rites, and every man who is strong and cunning enough to enforce his authority and to subject the weak, will always be a chief among them. Marriage ceremonies they have none, and when a native takes a lubra to himself for good, it is pretty certain that, however young she may be, she has had connection with most of the men of the tribe. These women are often obtained by stealing them from another tribe, in which case the unhappy creature is generally beaten into a state of insensibility, or they are exchanged, any man giving his own sister for that of another ; thus many young men who have no sister to offer, are deprived of the blessings of the conjugal state, or rather they possess no lubra which they may order about, or make a slave of.

They exchange wives out of compliment to visitors of other tribes, during the time of their stay ; and they freely offer both their wives and daughters to any European who may have a piece of damper, a fish-hook, or any other present to bestow. They treat their children kindly, though they do not hesitate to destroy them sometimes at their birth, and particularly if the babe is a cripple ; still I remember a man, named Piper, with malformed feet, who was then about twenty-five years of age, and able to make a living as well as any other blackfellow.

The children do almost what they like ; it sounds ridiculous, though it is a fact, when I say that they often leave the mother's breast, to take the pipe out of her mouth, and have a smoke ; they suckle their children often for four years and more. Of their dogs the natives are almost as fond as of their children. Women do not hesitate to suckle pups ; and it is not to be wondered at, that under such circumstances, the dogs become much attached to the aboriginals : and if only with them for a few nights, they seldom follow their white master again. They sleep

with their dogs, gnaw at the same bone with them, and though they do not feed them well, the kind treatment makes up for the rest; and as I mentioned before, a well-bred dog left with blackfellows for a few days, is a lost dog for ever.

It has been stated that they were in the habit of killing their aged men and women; this, however, must be a mistake, as I have noticed them to carry an old man about from place to place, who had been a cripple for 8 or 10 years. Cases of insanity are, I believe, of very rare occurrence; though I remember a single instance,—a boy about 14 years of age was pointed out to me as a “silly boy:” but I had not sufficient time to observe him, he played football with the other boys of the tribe and appeared to be the most expert of them.

Though they have not the faintest idea of religion, they are yet very superstitious: the universal belief that every death in their own little circle is caused by a member of a neighbouring tribe, and that vengeance will be taken accordingly is one of the principal causes perhaps of their rapid disappearance from among us. As soon as a native has breathed his last, messengers are sent to friendly families in the neighbourhood, and if bad news travels fast in civilised countries, it appears to travel much faster in the Australian bush. It is only with great reluctance that they pronounce the name of a departed friend, and if their wailings and the personal chastisement they inflict upon themselves, upon such occasions are proofs of their sorrow, their feelings must be intense.

The men seldom if ever wail, though they often inflict fearful gashes, principally upon their heads, mixing the blood with gypsum and thus cause the formation of a thick crust or skull cap which is frequently renewed. I have noticed a fine young fellow mourning the death of a young girl, (neither sister nor bride), stretch like Mucius Scævola his right arm into the fire until that limb was almost roasted, the skin cracked and hanging around it in large patches.

The women perform the noisy part of the business, howling incessantly for days and weeks, and only leaving off during meal time, and when tired out they fall asleep for a few hours. The deeper they mourn the more gypsum is laid on, so that some-

times nothing but the eyes, ears, and mouth, remain uncovered. Their burial rites I have had no opportunity to observe, but always found the graves well kept, and have generally seen the most romantic spots selected for the last resting place of their departed.

On the Lower Darling these sepulchres were generally made in some shield-like enclosure of brush wood, shaded by drooping acacias or cypress-pines, and covered with a rude hut of bark or brush wood, into which for a long period afterwards casual passers-by—friends of the lost one—implant a green bough, so that by the number of these boughs one may judge in what estimation the poor creature was held who rested beneath. Their strong belief that they will re-appear as white men, is well known, as also the desire to see a certain likeness in white men with one or another of their lost friends. The way in which they try to find out in which direction to take vengeance for a deceased member is singular. After the sand has been smoothed around the grave and the brush enclosure is formed, they leave the ground, returning from time to time until by some insect or other accidental cause the smooth surface has been disturbed, and in that direction retaliation is sought; of late they are satisfied to throw a waddy or a few harmless spears at the first unlucky strange black they may thus encounter; while formerly they tried to shed blood at least, if not able to kill their victim.

Before concluding I shall say a few words about their artistic skill, which is confined to the embellishment of their rude weapons and skin coverings; they seldom go beyond a series of straight lines at various angles, red and white being the usual color to set off the pattern. They are however tolerably good observers, as there is no difficulty whenever they carve the figure of a fish, a bird, or a mammal, upon a sandstone rock, or trace the same on a piece of blackened bark, to recognise the genus of the animal thus represented. The numerous bays and inlets of Port Jackson abound with such carvings, but on the Murray I have never seen any thing beyond a few tracings on sheets of blackened bark, probably done during a rainy day.



Krefft, Johan Ludwig Gerhard. 1865. "On the manners and customs of the Aborigines of the lower Murray and Darling." *Transactions of the Philosophical Society of New South Wales* 357–374. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.345642>.

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