Mode of Preparing the Dead Among the Natives of the Upper Mary River, Queensland.

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With the exception of the charcoal, I found no evidence of civilisation, no split bone or flint flake ; nothing but stone hammers or pounders, varying in size, some larger than a man's head, but all of the same round boulder-like form, similar to the stones that formed the beach. Two from the middle of the heaps are exhibited. Mr. R. Etheridge, of the Geological Survey, has kindly examined the shells exhibited : there is nothing peculiar about them ; such are common on all parts of the coasts of the British Islands.

- c. *Ostrea edule*, junior and seniorOysters.
- b. *Mytilus edulis*Mussels.
- Cardium edule*.....Cockles.
- a. *Pullastra decussata*
- Littorina littorea* (*vulgaris*).....Periwinkles.

Mr. J. W. FLOWER exhibited a large jade implement from New Zealand.

The following paper was read :

MODE of PREPARING *the DEAD among the NATIVES of the UPPER MARY RIVER, QUEENSLAND.* Extract of a letter dated October 1870, from Mr. ALBERT McDONALD. Communicated by W. BOYD DAWKINS, Esq., M.A., F.R.S.

THE following account describes some of the customs which the "black fellows" are so careful to conceal from the English settlers. Mr. McDonald, having succeeded in gaining the confidence of the natives, was treated in every respect as one of themselves. A "black fellow"—the stepson of a chief—had died, and he resolved to see what they were going to do with him. What he saw was as follows :

When we reached the camp, there were some half-a-dozen boys and young men (whites) who had walked out to see them. The blacks were very glad to see me, for the poor black fellow was dead, and they asked me to send all the others away ; so I explained to them that they had better go, and I sent George with them. When they had fairly got away there came the "tug of war"; the natives ordered me home. I put my brightest smile on, and reminded them of their promise ; still no use ; "never white fellow see black fellow dead." I considered for a few minutes what I could do ; and, while considering, I took a good look at the whole of them. I counted ten men, and about as many women, and the usual accompaniment of boys and girls and little children ; and then on a sheet of bark that was across a couple of saplings lay the corpse, covered with opossum rugs.

I saw they were mostly looking at me, and the men certainly did not look pleased. I then called my man Billy aside, and asked him the reason, and gave him to understand that when I made them a promise I always kept it, and now I expected the same treatment from them, and that I was fully determined to stay and see the operation. To make my story short, I got a reluctant consent from two of them; they then explained to the others; some of them said "all right", but some of them said nothing, but their looks meant that if they only dared they would get rid of me.

I was now informed that the ceremony never took place in the camp, and that they were going at once, so I had better follow. Four of them got the body on their shoulders, and walked away at a smart pace right out into the forest, and all followed, without any attempt at order. As I kept pretty near the last, I had a fine view of this funeral procession. First went the four carrying the body on their shoulders; and alongside of them the mother dancing and wailing all the way, and a sad sight she was, all covered with blood; and there was the step-father, roaring at the top of his voice every now and then, and the men all around with spears, and "hullah" crying and roaring; and, of course, all were quite naked. I got into conversation with a "gin", who seemed very intelligent, and she explained to me that there were certain places only where they skinned them, and that we were not going very far; nor did we, for in about twenty minutes we came to a halt: down went the corpse; and, after taking a good look round and talking the matter over, they prepared to commence. Those who were not going to take an active part, sat down at a little distance. I was now, I admit, a little excited. My long wished for scene was about to be observed, and I knew that to attempt to take notes on paper would at once arouse their suspicions, and perhaps spoil all. So I tried hard to prepare my mind to note as much as possible.

First thing, the chief took his station at the head of the body, spear in hand, and remained there the whole time, evidently on the look-out for some expected enemy (who did not come); he also at intervals kept up the roaring. Several of the men and women collected wood, and started a fire on each side of the body—perhaps six feet from it. While the fire was burning up, a good supply of bark was collected, and some put near each fire. I then observed one of them bring in "bloodwood" saplings, about four or six inches in diameter, cut into lengths of about five feet each. They were held in the fire till the bark was all charred off; then they were carefully put leaning against a tree on their ends. All seemed now ready; some of them lighted their pipes, and again all eyes were directed on me. I

was leaning against a tree on the side of the ring next to home, although I knew perfectly well that, if they really intended mischief, it would be of little use running away from their spears. A couple of them then came up to me, and told me that I was a good fellow, "no gammon about me"; I was admitted amongst them, and I was all the same as a black fellow now; and they told me that if I saw any other white coming they would tell me, and I was to go and persuade them to go away; for they said (clutching their spears) "we will not let them come"; and really they looked as if they would certainly be as good as their word.

The rugs were then removed, and this was the signal for a fresh outburst of grief; the women again cut their heads with the tomahawks; and I can give you my word that there was no doubt about it, for at a distance of several yards I could hear quite distinctly the thud of the weapon upon the bone. They cut the crown of the head. When they had had a few chops each, the men took the tomahawks from them; they quieted down again, and at length commenced operations. I then saw that my Billy was chief operator: he and another got each of them a piece of bark, and held it in the fire for a minute, and then applied it to the skin of the body, beginning at the breast. As the skin got heated, the outer skin was peeled off with their nails in little pieces; in fact, I think it was more like singeing and scraping it than anything else. The small pieces of skin were carefully put in a little "dilly bag", and now the charred saplings came to be used. As soon as a little piece was cleared off the black skin, the skin underneath looked like a dirty reddish white, which was at once blacked with the charred bark. The wind was very changeable, and, as there was a queer smell that came from the legs, I kept moving with the wind. Whilst they were busy, an old "gin" came up, who had been away getting yams; but, as soon as she got close up, she seized a tomahawk, and commenced the skull chopping game; the chief ran up, and, after a struggle, got it from her; he then very affectionately wiped the blood from her head with a handful of grass; she then came and sat down at the head of the corpse, and, crying very hard, put her foot on the head. I noticed that every new comer (there were several) did the same.

As the skinning or scraping was a tedious process, I had a little time to spare, and had a good long talk with the chief and several of the other men who were on the look-out. I was glad when they asked me what I thought about death, what became of them, etc. I had a good opportunity, and did my best to explain the hope which we have. I should have said that, as soon as the body was uncovered, an old man, who is said to be

king, commenced and carried on an imaginary conversation with the spirit which they still seemed to think was in the body. They asked all kinds of questions, such as "Where are you now?" "What sort of place is it?" "Have you seen your father yet?" "What is he doing?" and then the refrain, "Why did you leave your poor old mother? She has no son to hunt for her now."

When the breast was all scraped and charred, they got ready to turn the body, and evidently this was an important part of the ceremony. All hands got close round, and then one at the head and one at the feet; he was lifted steadily but quickly, and turned completely over, the whole mob of them giving a great whir'r as they did so. I at once remembered having seen them doing the same thing on their grand Corroberie; the men all stoop and give their arms a long swing from right to left, at the same time making the whirring noise. The back was done in the same manner, and then all hands had a smoke. The body now shone and looked quite smooth, as the charcoal had been well rubbed in, and it was lying straight stretched out, the arms at right angles with the body, back uppermost. A piece of red raddle was now produced, and Billy commenced to mark it, all of them at the same time giving their opinion as to how the marking should be done. Standing over the body, he felt for the backbone, close up to the neck, and then with his fingers measured what seemed about two inches on each side of the backbone close up to the neck, and then drew a line down each side of the backbone, right over each hip, and so on down to the ankle of each leg. Then from the top of each of the lines, beginning at the neck, lines were drawn at right angles down each arm to the wrist. After the lines were drawn Billy sat down for a few minutes. I was at a loss to know the meaning of these red lines; why two of them should be made I could not make out. Presently Billy and another black got a knife each, and the real skinning commenced, and in no nice or gentle fashion. Billy, putting the knife in just as I would have done into the hide of a bullock, made a long straight cut following the line, and then commenced to skin in earnest. Very soon the arms were skinned, the hands dexterously cut off at the wrists, and left attached to the skin; the sides were next skinned and right down over the hip, thus leaving a strip of about four inches wide down the middle of the back. When as much was skinned as they could get at without turning him over, this strip was commenced with, but I think they were fully half an hour taking off this narrow strip. Four men took hold of the body, one to each arm and leg; a fifth held his head between his legs and hands; another now got across the body, started the strip with the knife until he raised a piece that

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he could get hold of, he then fixed his feet firmly and got ready for a pull.

The old king now knelt by the head and spoke in a very excited manner to the dead man, after which they gave a great pull at the skin ; but it appeared to me that he was very unwilling to part with this portion of it, for they had to appeal very often to him, and once or twice they had to ease it with the knife. At length they stripped down as far as they could. The body was then turned over for the last time—the strip then had the appearance of a tail, as it was put between the legs. They now skinned the front of the legs, and then pulled away at the tail again—it was pulled right up over the privates. I now saw by this method the skin was entire at the front, and it seemed to me that it was the best way it could be done. During the whole time the head was wrapped up in a cloth, never uncovered ; now when the whole body was skinned, they had the final conversation with him before cutting off his head. It came out then that grog was the primary cause of the fit of madness. I suppose it was *delirium tremens*, for the last words were, “ why were you so foolish as to eat so much grog ? ” Poor fellow, his head was now cut away, and as it was too late to stretch the skin that day, it was put in a “ dilly-bag.” The skin is stretched on spears and dried in the sun, the spears being so charmed by the process that ever after, when they are thrown at an enemy, they cannot miss ; hence, when a death takes place, all are anxious to get their spears used.

As soon as the skin was disposed of, Billy cut off the legs at the knees, then opened out the thighs to get out the bones, which were twisted out of the joints ; the shoulder blades were left attached to the arms at first, and there lay the trunk, head, arms, and legs gone, and nearly all hands busy, gins and all : one had a skin with the foot, another the arm up to the elbow, and so on, all scraping and cutting away the flesh from the bones : the trunk was cut open, and then I saw an old gin rubbing herself with a piece of fat. It was so sickening that I confess I got rather muddled, and I had a dreadful headache, with the excitement, the smoke, and stench. I am so sorry, for just then Billy cut out of the chest, I think, a piece of something which all examined very closely, and I stupidly did not ask for it to look at. It was said to be the stone which some hostile black always put into them, and is always the cause of death, if they are not killed in battle. While they were busy examining this, the look-out saw a white man in the distance. I went and got him to go away. When I got back they were still busy, and great lumps of the meat were roasting on the fire. I asked a gin very cautiously what was to be done with the meat ; she said, Dig a hole and put

it in. I pointed to the roasting; she, however, denied that they ever ate any now. Soon she and another gin commenced to dig a hole each close to the fire; these holes were lined with grass. She said the meat would be put in and be covered up, and a large fire made on the top of it, so that the native dogs could not get to it. Just then the cry, "white fellow!" was again heard, and when I looked, I saw a neighbour, not very far off. I was going over to tell him not to come, but they were afraid of him getting too near, I think, for Billy snatched up a spear, ran past me, and stood right before him: "You must not come here," holding up the spear—"you go away." He took the hint and went back. My head ached very bad, and as I thought there was little more to be seen, I went away with him. They, however, called me back, and asked me if I would lend them a little flour, as they could not eat meat now; so they sent a couple of gins home with me for the flour, and I was very glad to get home and get a cup of strong tea.

They abstain from kangaroo for several weeks after a death. I am still in a fix about the eating of the flesh. They all admit they used to eat it, but they all deny eating any now, and I foolishly came away without seeing the end of it, but I was used up, and if I had stayed, I do not think they would have eaten it in my presence.

I have not stated that both men and women cut themselves severely as a token of grief—the men on the body and legs, the women on the crown of the head, and body, and legs. The mother in this case was cut from head to foot; the father from the hip to the ankles.

The following note was read:

On some FORMS of ANCIENT INTERMENTS in Co. ANTRIM. By
J. SINCLAIR HOLDEN, M.D., F.G.S., M.A.L.

THE population of the north-east part of Ireland has undergone so many changes within the last few centuries, that it is not to be wondered at there should be rather a paucity of structural relics, as compared with the south and west, where the purer Celtic race still flourishes, and cherishes the ancient remains bequeathed to them.

There is one portion of co. Antrim called the Glens, which has up to the present time been occupied by a remnant of the "old stock", speaking the Irish language, and presenting many of the characteristic Celtic traits, though very likely another generation or two will see obliterated these already fading features. This ethnological "preserve" is probably owing to the nature of the country: the bold rocky coast, mountain ranges,

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