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NATIVES OF THE EVERARD RANGES.

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

With Plate H.

Australia: Ethnography.

White.

The Natives of the Everard Ranges. *By S. A. White.*

67

The Everard Ranges are situated about 300 miles west of Oodnadatta, and extend east and west for about 50 miles, the highest peak being Mount Illbillie, 3,000 feet. They are composed of reddish-brown granite; between these high bare ridges, which run for miles in an unbroken line, fine valleys exist, covered to a great depth in decomposed granite, in the form of granite sand, and after rains must produce a rich growth of vegetation; many of the rocks have a tendency to weather into caves and recesses in which were often found pictorial works of the dusky owners of the country. Creeks meander through many of these valleys, and in some instances have washed the greater part out, through the erosive action having been going on for a great length of time; the creeks do not find their way far from the ranges, and are soon lost in soft sand. In the ranges and amongst the great masses of detached boulders, there are many rock holes, probably formed by boulders lodging on the flat side of a rock, which, by the agency of running water, have revolved until they have worn cistern-shaped cavities; the boulders themselves have been worn away in the action.

The natural reservoirs vary in size from some holding many hundreds of gallons, to those holding but a pint or so. Amidst and around these scenes dwell a fine race of people, well nourished, well grown, and well disposed towards white men. In most cases they have broad high foreheads, the brows are arched and protruding, the cheek bones are high, the nose broad at the nostrils, although in some cases I have seen them quite aquiline in shape; the mouth is large and lips thick; jaws very powerful, and teeth strong; hair dark and generally wiry. Many of the men were over six feet high. Chest, arms and back bear many cicatrices and the chests are often decorated by a half circle of white down from the wedge-tailed eagle, stuck to the body by the agency of human blood; the body is very often smeared with red ochre. The young men spend much time in binding their hair up into a chignon, which stands out at the back 10 or 12 inches, and is decorated with hawk's feathers. Both sexes move about in quite a nude state. The men often wear around their bodies a strand or two of string made from twisted human hair, which answers the purpose of carrying small articles, they being thrust under it at the back; when drawn tightly round the body this helps to stave off the pangs of hunger.

The women in some cases are quite gracefully built and many of them are very tall; they are all very well nourished, hands and feet small; the hair, which is short (a circumstance which is, no doubt, due to having to supply the material for hair string), is very often drawn to the front and tied up in a small knob over the forehead. Many fat and jolly children in arms were seen. The dispositions of these natives are as variable as our own: they are cheerful and sad, willing and disobliging, smart and lazy. They sleep on the bare ground all in a row; the men and boys in one camp, the women and girls in another; a slight depression is made in the sandy soil to clear away the burrs and to allow the hips to rest in. No covering is used, but a small fire is kept going on either side; all being in a row one fire does for two persons; these fires have to be replenished every little while during the night. Both men and women as well as the children had many bad scars, caused by rolling on to the hot embers in their sleep.

It was noticed that the native who followed us for some time had acquired some cast-off clothing from the members of our party; he wore it all through the heat of the day, but at night when he lay down to sleep in the frosty air, he divested himself of every article. The women folk are kept in great subjection by

the elders of the tribes, and when addressed by the men in angry tones, they simply tremble, yet the children are treated with great leniency and are allowed to do almost as they like; the girls follow their mothers out food hunting, and at a very early age start the almost unceasing work of procuring food, which is looked upon as a woman's work. The boys knock about the camp, or go out after game with the men; when quite young they learn to make spears, and throw them, in order to acquire dexterity. The spear in the first place is a new toy and is used in play with as much vivacity and preoccupation as marbles or other games with white boys; so these boys in all their joyous abandon of unclad sport, practise with their spears till their eyes are so well trained that they seldom miss their mark, and the art of throwing the spear is burnt into their brain as it was with generation after generation of their forefathers; these children are just as noisy and enthusiastic in their play as white children.

Weapons and Utensils.—The spear is practically the only weapon of defence, and the only one with which they can kill large game; each man carries from three to five spears called *ooruta*. They are of the single barb variety, and the head is made of hard wood and called *warta*, it being spliced in and bound to the shaft by means of sinews and tendons of animals. The barb is slightly curved, made of wood and also bound to the flat side of the spear head, by means of sinews, the latter called *marbine*: the shafts are nearly all in two pieces, being spliced at the smaller end and bound with sinews. These spears are thrown by means of a throwing stick called *mooro*. This instrument is the best of the kind I have seen amongst the Central Australian natives, for it is constructed with a deep concave upper side, in which the spear rests; the tooth which takes the weight of the spear is attached by sinews and resin; at the handle end a piece of flint or quartz in the shape of a chisel is stuck on very firmly by means of resin obtained from the porcupine grass often, but erroneously, called spinefex; this chisel-shaped piece of stone is used for roughing out spears and other work; the men also carry a hard mulga stick between three and four feet long sharpened at one end, which is hardened by fire, this is called *wanna* and is used for many purposes, mostly in procuring food. A small wooden bowl or dish about 12 to 18 inches long by 6 to 8 inches broad, completes the native's outfit. The latter article which is called *miera*, is used for carrying water, food, etc., but, more often as a scoop to remove the soil after it has been loosened by the pointed stick. The women carry a pointed stick and a large wooden bowl or dish called *mika*. This is large enough to cradle a big child, a purpose for which it is often used. The dusky maiden of the far north-west of South Australia has no wardrobe to carry about, not even the strand of hair string, so often worn by the men, and from this we must suppose that their women folk are denied the means of lessening the pangs of hunger. The large wooden dish carried by the women will often contain a great assortment of food at the close of a day's hunting; there will be edible roots, wood-boring grubs, young rabbits, lizards of many varieties, the fruits of the native fig tree, and on top of all a fat, chubby, laughing black baby. When the mothers are busy hunting for food, digging out rabbits, etc., they place their infants in the big wooden bowl or dish, then place it in the fork of a mulga tree 5 or 6 feet from the ground with a bunch of leaves over the top to keep the sun off; the child sleeps the while and keeps quite quiet, unless the ants find it out, and then the mothers are acquainted with the fact, as mothers all over the world are.

Food and Water Supply.—Kangaroos are plentiful in some districts, and they are looked upon as royal game and are restricted to the warriors of the tribe; the wallaby comes next, and then beautiful little animals of the rock variety which are quite numerous amongst the great masses of granite boulders. The favourite time for the native to hunt the wallaby is just at sundown, because the animals come out of

their hiding places, and sit upon the rocks on the western side, the rocks giving out the heat generated by the afternoon sun; at this time the animals are much less wary as they stretch out on the warm rocks, or are busily engaged making their toilets.

The imported rabbit has made its way through country white man has never trodden, and has only been stopped by the sea on the other side; these imported pests have supplied a good article of food for the natives; the hunting of the rabbit is generally left to their women folk, because this class of work seems something beneath the black man's dignity.

One, if not *the* staple food, is the large larvæ of a moth. The native can tell by the foliage of the shrub if one of these grubs is attacking the roots; he raps the ground with his stick (*wanna*) and ascertains where the root is situated, this being done, he digs with the pointed end of the stick and places it under the root, which is levered up, and grasped by the hands; a sharp tug is given, and when the root parts from the stem, a grub is invariably found; they are eaten raw by biting off the head and squeezing the contents into the mouth, but more often they are collected and brought into camp, when they are placed in the hot ashes for a few minutes. The outside covering then becomes like parchment and the inside the colour and consistency of the yolk of an egg, and is of quite a nutty flavour. The food must be highly nutritious and wholesome. Many species of lizards are sought after for food, especially the "Jew Lizard," which is so relished that on several occasions the natives could not be induced to part with these lizards, although white man's food was offered in exchange.

Owing to the great drought (a good rain not having fallen for *nine* years) one was unable to judge of the variety of vegetable foods. These would be very extensive in good seasons, there is no doubt, for large grinding stones, which had been used for years, were scattered all over the country; a few edible roots and the fruit of the native fig tree (*Ficus platypoda*) were the only vegetable foods these natives were seen to use.

After rain snails must form a large item in their diet, for around the remains of old fires large heaps of bleached shells were seen. Sugar ants are much sought after, and large holes are seen everywhere from 4 to 5 feet deep where the galleries of these insects have been followed into the ground; the native catches the ant by the forepart of the body, and then bites off the inflated abdomen, which contains the sweet liquid. The water supply is drawn chiefly from rockholes, which are numerous in the ranges, and vary much as to size. Very often boughs are placed in these holes in the rocks, to prevent birds and other animals getting in; unfortunately this discolours the water and gives it a nasty taint. Native wells or soaks were seen; these were generally shallow wells made in the sand close up to the rocks tapping a catchment underneath; sand was often filled into these holes, as well as into some of the rock holes, until the water was covered to prevent too rapid evaporation.

There were no old people seen, nor were there any cripples, or deformed persons; all deformed children are destroyed, and there is no doubt whatever that when both men and women get to a certain age they are killed and eaten. The Everard natives are always in great fear of the tribes of the Musgrave Ranges, calling them *mamoo*, this word being uttered in an awe-inspiring tone, and if the word *mamoo* be uttered when the natives are near they will give a jump and look around in a startled manner. They are quite free, in fact anxious, to tell you how the Musgrave blacks kill and eat any of the Everard people they may meet. Upon one occasion I was shown where a party of Musgrave natives had come upon one of the Everard women and a child; after killing them they lit a fire close by and cooked and ate their victims.

S. A. WHITE.