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On the Aborigines of Central Queensland.

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there is any difference in the stature or colour of the Eastern and Western Eskimo.

Mr. LEWIS would ask Dr. Beddoe whether the broad-headed people of Norway, to whose Lappaffinities he had alluded, were not of a much greater stature than the Lapps? Dr. Simms, of New York, a very intelligent observer, considered the mixture of Red Indian blood in the United States to be much greater, both in amount and influence, than was generally supposed.

Dr. BEDDOE: Not conspicuously. I judge from physiognomy that the round-heads are darker, and are partly of Lappish or Finnish descent. As to stature I cannot speak.

Dr. RAE, in reply, said: Never having myself taken measurements of Eskimo skulls, I am wholly dependent upon, and take my facts from, skulls shown and most ably described by Professor Flower at the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, believing such information to be the most trustworthy that could be obtained. This very short paper does not profess to discuss the subject of which it treats, its chief if not its only object being to draw attention to what appears to the writer to be an interesting question in ethnology.

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Dr. BEDDOE then read the following paper:—

*On the ABORIGINES of CENTRAL QUEENSLAND.*  
By Dr. BEDDOE, F.R.S.

THE subject of the brief paper I am about to read, is not one with which I have any personal acquaintance: I have merely put together some of the materials which have been imparted to me by Mr. Robert Christison, who holds a large tract of land near the head-waters of the Thomson and Landsborough Rivers, stocked chiefly with sheep, but partly with cattle and horses, and who has been settled in that part of the colony about thirteen years. I think it probable that there is no man in Queensland (unless it be a few who are officially connected with the aborigines) who has had so much to do with these people in what may be called their wild state.

It is important therefore to state that in Mr. Christison's opinion, the current estimate of the moral, if not also of the intellectual status of these people, is very much too low. The aborigines of Queensland, and indeed of all Australia, are stigmatised as irreclaimable, and incapable of gratitude, affection or attachment to their white masters or neighbours; as thievish and bloodthirsty, and thus dangerous to the property and lives of the whites as incapable of anything like steady, honest,

continuous work, and therefore useless to the settlers; and finally, as very sparingly endowed even with those social virtues whose objects are limited to their own people, such as conjugal and parental affection.

Mr. Christison's experience traverses every point of this indictment more or less completely.

Within a few years of his settlement on the lands he occupies, where he was the earliest European invader, he succeeded in establishing friendly relations with a tribe who had dwelt there, called Dalleyburra, and numbering about 300 in all; and by a judicious mixture of firmness, justice and kindness, established himself as their ruler. Considerable numbers of them have been employed since then, in tending herds, sheep and cattle, in sheep-washing, bark-stripping, timber-cutting, and various other occupations.

Women and children have been employed as well as men; and, as might perhaps have been expected, the women are at least as useful as the men for hard or continuous work, such as attending sheep in the lambing season, and the like. Considerable alterations in their other habits have of course taken place, more or less directly connected with the acquisition of new habits and methods of labour. One of these is that of course they have learned to smoke and enjoy tobacco, and have thus established a new artificial want, which, as it links them on to the European dispenser of this luxury, is useful as supplying a motive to labour, and may conceivably be morally beneficial. The use of alcohol remains happily unknown. European clothing is adopted to some extent; shirts and blankets at all events are highly appreciated; and the cleanliness of the natives employed about the station is said to be decidedly in advance of that of the lower class of Europeans.\*

Sheep-stealing occurred, and caused some trouble, in the early days; cases of this kind were always carefully investigated and punished; and nothing of the kind has now happened for several years.

Conjugal and parental affection appear to be strongly developed in both sexes. Quarrels of course occur, and occasionally the husband may chastise the wife; but this is not common, and the tie between them is in the main one of

\* It is noteworthy that they are rapidly dropping the use of their own language as they acquire the English, or a form of English; and that their own communications with each other are largely carried on in the new tongue. The same is the case with imported Polynesian labourers. When we know that the number of Englishmen employed on Mr. Christison's stations has always been very small, the work having been almost entirely performed by natives or by Polynesians, we must recognise in this rapid change of language a very remarkable fact.

affection. Instances have happened in which a father or mother has sold a boy to a travelling squatter or other European; but inasmuch as the property supposed to be alienated invariably re-transfers himself, according to a previous arrangement, in the course of a day or two, such transactions are evidence of what Uncle Sam would call smart dealing, and not of want of parental feeling.

When kindly, justly, but firmly treated, individuals become strongly attached to their white master. When accompanying him on exploring expeditions, they have been known, provisions running short, to refuse their scanty rations for successive days, rather than suffer their master to want. It is noteworthy, considering the nature of the country and climate, that in Mr. Christison's opinion the so-called blacks are less able to bear thirst and the deprivation of water than white men, though they can go longer without solid food.

Many of the men are of good stature, some perhaps 6 feet high, with good muscular development, even of the legs, but no fat. They are like a well-known personage, not nearly so black as they are painted: the deep colour being in a great measure due to the constant use of an unguent of powdered charcoal and snake-fat, or iguana-fat, not with a view to adornment, but to comfort, as it prevents the cracking of the tender skin in their hot and dry climate. Snake-fat is highly valued, and much of it is husbanded for this purpose, though from the scarcity of fat in most kinds of food attainable, it is also esteemed a great culinary luxury. In fact, snakes furnish a great portion of their food; all kinds are eaten, venomous and harmless; but the blackman always carefully smashes the head to pulp with a stone. In the treatment of snake bites he shows a knowledge and skill hardly to be expected. Thus, a bite having been received near the ankle, he ties a ligature round the limb, and then scarifies it deeply in a circle above the wound.

I have already mentioned that the Australians cannot long endure thirst. The fact that numbers of them have been found in districts where Europeans perished, or ran the risk of perishing, for lack of water, is to be accounted for solely by their minute and accurate acquaintance with the signs of the presence of water, which enables them to discover it where white men fail to do so. They are knowing as to the qualities of water, and are aware of the risk of drinking cold water too hastily in large quantities.

Their spears, tomahawks, waddies and other weapons much resemble those used in other parts of Australia. Their boomerangs, in the use of which they have a skill quite unattainable by a white man, are small, and have a smaller curve than some

brought from South Australia. The same curious quadripartite division of the tribe exists here as elsewhere in Australia, with the recognized object of preventing in-and-in breeding.

## DISCUSSION.

Mr. EVANS: Is it the fact that these people are lighter than the South Australian blacks?

Mr. CHRISTISON: Yes, I think so.

Mr. HARRISON: Are the infants fair?

Mr. CHRISTISON: Yes, almost white.

Dr. BEDDOE: But the hair is always black?

Mr. CHRISTISON: Yes, always black and curly.

Dr. BEDDOE: They talk English to each other?

Mr. CHRISTISON: Yes, the young people do, and even the old ones sometimes.

Dr. RAE: Are they great eaters?

Mr. CHRISTISON: Only at first; but when they have become used to rations and regular meals, including bread or damper, they are very moderate eaters, perhaps more moderate than Europeans.

Col. LANE FOX having taken the chair, said: He felt sure the meeting would wish to return their thanks to Dr. Beddoe for his interesting communication, as well as to Mr. Christison for the information upon which the paper had been based. In a country where the arts of the aborigines are so generally uniform as Australia, minute differences, such as a resident only is likely to notice, are of great interest; by such observations, we shall in time be able to map out all variations that have taken place in the different parts of the continent, and perhaps trace them to their sources. The remark that natives suffer more from thirst than Europeans, is singular and unexpected; one would imagine, that in a country where such great scarcity of water exists, natural selection would have produced a race capable of great endurance in this respect, but the reverse appears actually to be the case.

Mr. LEWIS remarked that the skins of the natives of Queensland seemed to be much lighter than those in South Australia, judging from the photograph of the former then exhibited, as compared with photographs of the latter in his possession.

The meeting then separated.

