

THE REVEREND W. B. CLARKE IN ILLAWARRA.

It may be remembered that some months ago Mr. Edgar Beale gave a lecture to the Society dealing with the journey of the great geologist, the Rev. W. B. Clarke, M.A., through the Illawarra district in the last days of 1839 and the early days of 1840.

The Mitchell Library has authorised the publication of a further extract from the Diary kept by this famous visitor, and the subject now dealt with is the Corroboree of the local blacks dramatising the arrival of white men on the east coast of Australia.

This extract opens after Clarke's arrival in Wollongong, where he stayed at an Inn, and continues:—

Geologised again along the shore. Mr. Agate and Mr. Rich joined our party, having arrived by the Steamer in the morning early. Mr. Manning, Chairman of Geo. Socy., also called and dined with us today at 3.

I rode before dinner to Towridgi about 4 miles along the beach in returning going through the bush thither. The soil black, the vegetation rich. Passed a creek which is bridged (when bridge is perfect) by palm trees, and through some Maize fields into a woody marsh behind the sand hills, near the road to Bulli. Towridgi point is sand stone of Wollongong at the extremity, but $\frac{1}{2}$ the way nearest the shore is occupied by enormous blocks of black trap which also appears below as a dyke, direction approximately N.E. I could not trace it beyond the sand hills. The sea was very rough and the wind high and there was a constant mist of salt water coming from the spray, evident to the eye, as well as feel. On the point there were pieces of fossil wood, of granite, shale, etc. The beach was marked by the impressions of 2 naked feet which had come from Bulli, evidently a black fellow's. The sand blown up high is stratified by the wind and ribbed. The mare did not at first like the sea, but galloped on gaily afterwards. On going we crossed the dry bed of a stream which runs into the sea between Touridgi and Wollongong. The road crossed the stream where the water was flowing, near some hard rocks cutting huge masses of trap. In the mud of the fresh water we found several curios. I saw no birds save a crow-like gull.

In the evening strolled out with Mr. Dana and Mr. Rich behind the Quarry. But the sea was so high, that the spray wetted us all through, and we returned. The Steamer was about to start for Sydney — the beach was piled high with boxes and foxcages, and at 7 a large party of convicts went on board through a heavy surf, and light rain, and after them a smaller boat, and at last the steamer departed. I was reminded of departing in the Calais Mail from Dover Bay. I had sent off by her a box of specimens—the Evening was spent in instructive converse—till about 9 when Mr. Agate, Mr. Rich and myself went off to attend a corrobory, a meeting of the Blacks, to which we had been invited by "old Fryng Pan" alias Brown Bean, and some others, whom we got to throw the Boomerang for our amusement after dinner.

"Fryng Pan" I had seen at Mr. Nichols' store yesterday and again today—he was guide also to Mr. Foster. He is a fisherman, but when I asked him to catch me some Dildils, a huge prawn abounding here, he was angry, and said only women took them. Men catch nothing but with the spear.

About 10 we reached the Corrobory ground.

It was in the Bush where several large Teatrees were growing. Three or four fires made known the spot, to which we are at first directed by the laughter of the blacks. Beside a fire to the right over which sat an old woman whom we had seen in town dressed in a dirty pink gown thrown over her, lay 8 naked fellows, daubing themselves over with white pipe clay, which they first chewed to make soft, and red ochre, etc. They lay on their backs forming bands of white over their chests, arms and legs, and then they rubbed each others' backs with red-ochre, rising from time to time, that the old lady might see that all was perfectly properly done. They then bound their middles with strip of linen, having a tassel at each end, one of which hung down before, the other behind. When this was done, during which time their spears stood against a tree, they sipped some liquor from a tin pot which was got at by means of a piece of rope-yarn, the liquor turned out to be sugar and water. Around the other fires lay various groups of men and women, some partly and some wholly clad, others quite naked. One fellow who was as black as Erebus, wore a large straw hat, and as we came up, said in excellent English "I have nothing to do with getting up this Corrobory. I have not been at one for several years." The facility with which the Blacks acquire our language is wonderful—several spoke as well as this fellow. When the ball was ready to be begun they told us to go to a fire which two half-naked women were making. I lent a hand and plucked some of the soft tea-tree bark for them and in a few minutes there was a great blaze, illumining the overhanging arches of the trees and

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showing their trunks like the column of a cathedral aisle. I could not fail to be impressed with a feeling of wild sublimity, especially as fire after fire blazed up and I found myself amongst at least 100 native savages, many of them in a state of perfect nudity and looking most unearthly. One, a tall thin fellow without a rag upon him, sat over a solitary fire alone, stirring the ashes with a stick having a hook to it, the machine with which he catches worms and maggots from the trees. By another fire sat a man with his wife and child, the latter ill with fever. I asked how old it was, the answer was "holding up the hands twice and two fingers twice, 2 years of 24 moons."

About five minutes after we had assembled we heard from a dark corner a low melancholy sort of chant, and a beating of a waddy against a shield; the shout grew louder, at first it was sung by two voices, then by several, voice after voice chiming in till it burst out in a most unearthly howl—the noise increasing. O'Roa seemed to be frequently repeated. After the first chant, the singers came out into the light and we then saw one man with a reddish cotton pocket-handkerchief on his shoulders beating the waddy against the shield, the chief musician who sang with another beside him. The sound appeared to be emitted from the chest with a great straining of muscles, as if it caused pain.

The dancers, 8 in number, then came out, each having in his hand a bunch of fresh leaves, the very bouquet of an English belle—and when the chant began again, in which all seemed to join, they commenced the dance—by moving the right limb first the left afterwards, backwards and forwards with a low grunting coincident with the kicking out of the limbs. Then one at a time they advanced, opened their legs, stood perfectly erect and stiff, and jerked the whole body by a violent muscular movement in and out by the knees. This was clearly a difficult part, and very painful to continue, as it lasted but for a moment, and I observed that they whisked the green boughs about them after it as if to cool themselves. The song was going on all the while, and the entertainment consisted in repeating the song and dance together. This was done several times when the party who were looking on, reminding me strongly of the old dowagers and aunts and uncles at an English ball, began to express dissatisfaction. Amongst the complainers was Mr. Frying Pan, who with a red-night cap on his head, sat beside the first fire, he made a great noise, and when, as I was informed by an interpreter, he urged the dancers on and they said they could not get more than themselves to dance—he said "if the man won't dance why don't you take the woman?" which afforded great merriment to all who understood him. I use the word "understood" because it appears, that this Corrobory was called by the Sydney Blacks, and the ball given by them to the blacks of Kiama, Wollongong, Liverpool, Brisbane Water and New Castle from which places some came to this meeting. Now as they are of different tribes and do not speak the same dialect, several did not understand a single word of the song, which was a new one, and, therefore, no wonder it did not give satisfaction to them. On enquiry I find the burden of the song to be "that the white men came to Sydney in ships and landed the horses in the saltwater." It is of such ridiculous subjects that the Blacks of New Holland make their songs—and any trifling event is celebrated by a song. They appeared to be perfectly harmless, nor was there the slightest indecorum in their conduct on this occasion. There was a degree of quiet and silent gravity I was astonished at, and I could compare their behaviour to nothing so much as to that of well-behaved people at a similar Corrobory or Ball in England. On grave occasions the Corrobory has doubtless a different character, varying with circumstances . . . the only signs of war here were the spears with which some of the men danced, held upright before them. I recognised one of the dancers as a man with one arm, wearing a plate in the day time as chief of Wollongong; he had told me, that he lost his arm in the General Hospital. Another I knew to be the man who had thrown the Boomerang in the morning.

Of the Blacks it may be generally remarked, that they are fond of seeing the whites amongst them . . . they have kindness enough to perceive our advantages over them, and they generally ask for a

little response as Frying Pan did tonight.

before I left, when this Australian opera was not nearly done, as we returned home we heard the noise of song and dance evidently continued with uninterrupted ardour.

Old Frying Pan, whom I had seen before, seemed to have some notions of Religion, but it is certain they are in part borrowed from the whites. I examined him closely on the subject of Cannibalism. He was very angry at the idea, and said none of his people ever ate human flesh. But he allowed some bad fellows did up the country far away. I asked him what happened after death. He said "Go up on high tree—then go to great governor." He give bull (drink) plenty kangaroo, plenty opossum, plenty fish. On further enquiry he satisfied he this was not all original—for he used the term "God Almighty."

The blacks, however, certainly believe in a state after death. For they have an idea, that they are turned into white men — into whales, porpoises, etc., and many of them go so far as to address a whale or other great fish as their Uncle, Father, etc., and call them to come on shore to them. Nay, so far is this carried, that some time ago, a white man was asked by a Black to make atonement for an injury done by another, who was dead, because there happened to be a great resemblance between the dead man and the white.

The most extraordinary thing is the perfect way in which they pronounce and express themselves in English. Their own dialects appear to be pronounced thickly, only perfectly clear and well defined, even the harshest sounds.

I observed tonight a great diversity of colour and countenance. There were evidently more than one race.

(This ends the quotation).

NOTES.

1. The spelling throughout is Clarke's, including the variants of "Towradgi."

2. The description of the ride along the beach refers to the fact that in the early days the road down the mountains near Bulli emerged on to the beach, which constituted the road by following the shore as far as Wollongong, where the cliff forced the road to the top of the cliffs, hence making Cliff Road. This line was followed rather than through the heavy bush where the Prince's Highway now runs, for example.

3. Foxcages were crates for farm produce, being shipped on to the steamer for Sydney. This is quite a valuable description of early shipping methods before Wollongong Harbour as we know it was constructed.

4. The name of Old Frying-Pan (alias Brown Bean) should be Bran-Bran.

5. The description of aboriginal dancing by violent muscular movement is of what is known as knee action dancing, a method well known to anthropologists.

6. The native tribes referred to would have been the Awabakal (which was the tribe around the Sydney and Newcastle areas) and the WodiWodi, which was a tribe of the Yuin group living in the Illawarra district.

7. Old Frying-Pan's description of life after death is in part a reference to tree burials, where the bodies of the dead were placed on platforms in trees.

8. The reference to a whale or other great fish being the uncle or father of the blacks is really to the fact that the aborigines in question belonged to that totem.

For comments to illustrate the text, we are grateful to Mr. F. D. McCarthy, the famed Australian Anthropologist of the Museum in Sydney.

EDGAR BEALE,
President.

E. MACKRETH,
Secretary.