

**Peter Beveridge**



*The Aborigines  
of Victoria  
and Riverina*



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# INTRODUCTORY.

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IN this age of enlightened progression and scientific explorations, it is singular that ethnologists have permitted such a fruitful field for research as the colony of Victoria offers, to remain so long unutilised. In this, as in all the other settled sections of Australia, the aborigines are rapidly vanishing from off the face of the land, and although little more than fifty years have passed since the waters of the Yarra were first stirred from their normal placidity by the white man's oar, there is scarcely a single primitive inhabitant, or the descendant of one, to be met with, near any of the metropolitan centres; and ere another cycle has been added to the one now passing away, this primitive race will be extinct, as is that of the Moa—that is to say, unless some prompt remedial measures be adopted, other than those which have hitherto been obtained for their conservation.

From the earliest days of our Victorian colonisation, in fact, long before Australia Felix had attained to the rank of a State, when it was merely Port Phillip, a small appanage of the elder colony of New South Wales, there have been so-called Black Protectorates. The Moravians, too, have had missions to the heathen in various portions of the colony; and in Melbourne there is, and has been for years, a Board, designated the Central Board for the Protection of the Aborigines. Notwithstanding, however, the combined efforts of these bodies, the records of each year show a sad

diminution in the numbers of the natives upon those of preceding years. There are many reasons to account for the abortiveness of the attempts to ameliorate the condition, and conserve generally the dwindled remnants of these people, the principal one being found in themselves—viz., entire lack of self-restraint, when any one of their animal instincts chances to be in the ascendant. If it is frequently found, even amongst civilised races, that vice is preferred to virtue, is it wonderful that in most cases these poor savages desire that which we tell them is vicious, instead of that which is good?

Vice and virtue, as a matter of course, are only used here in a conventional sense, the aborigines not having any such arbitrary distinctions. Whatever pleases the preponderating propensity, for the time being, is deemed good, and that which fails to do so is evil according to their ethics. As, for example, most natives would sooner work hard a whole day for a bottle of bad rum, and be half starved as to food, than attend to the teachings of a missionary, though with little labour, and abundance of provisions. To this, it will doubtless be said, that rum-drinking is the white man's vice, and that he has no manner of right to imbue the unsophisticated native with it. We freely admit the truthfulness of this fact, but in doing so, contend that wherever the white man puts his foot there will intoxicating drink be found, and the poor ignorant savage has only to taste of the "fire water" a few times to become a confirmed drunkard, which he makes patent enough on every favourable opportunity. White men, Christians though they be, will not forego their wonted stimulant, though so destructive to the savage races. We

have seen yearly reports from time to time emanating from various of the protectorate bodies, some of which we knew, from actual contact with both the teachers and the taught, to be—well, unreliable. Consequently, judging by analogy, our faith in the flowery progress reports, as given to the public, is of the smallest.

The profligacy of their women is another fell source from whence much destruction to life proceeds; they contract disease, which spreads from them to the males, and being ignorant of its fatal character when unchecked, it is allowed to run its course, resulting speedily in a general prostration of the whole system, and finally in death. Did it cease then, however, it would not be so bad, but unfortunately it does not, as it is reproduced in the progeny to a frightful extent; and those of them who struggle on to the age of puberty transmit it again through their children, until at last the whole population eventually become tainted with the foul malady, and are therefore constitutionally unable to throw off the attacks of comparatively trivial ailments. Hence the numberless cases of consumption, or decline, together with almost countless disarrangements of a pulmonary character; whilst yet another phase of this fell disease is the wasting away of the tissues, until the frame becomes attenuation personified.

Another potent cause of increased mortality since the advent of Europeans is due to the unwise habit they have of dressing and living as white men do, for months together; then, all at once, just as the freak takes them, they discard the clothes and the regular living to which they have become accustomed, don their opossum cloak or blanket,

and betake themselves to their tribes, to their primitive *loonsthals*<sup>[1]</sup>, and hard fare, in a fit condition to contract any epidemic that may chance to be hovering about the camp, certain at least to have their joints racked by rheumatism, if they escape inflammation of the lungs. This last runs a very short course with the aborigines—a few days' violent cough, then hipitization, after which a brief day or two brings the end.

By comparison with the small remnant now exisiting the population was numerous, prior to European colonisation; but even at that time it was but a modicum of what the colony could easily have sustained without having recourse to other than the primitive methods then in force for gaining a livelihood; but their endless tribal feuds kept the increase of population continually in check. Thus it was, to use a colonialism, that the country was never at any time peopled up to its carrying capacity. These feuds never by any chance took the shape of battles; cowardice, and self-preservation, being too largely developed in the aboriginal character for that; but massacres, with their attendant horrors, were perpetrated at midnight or early dawn, when neither sex nor age expected, nor received quarter, when all were destroyed, save those only who had cunning and quickness enough to elude the vigilance of their bloodthirsty foemen in the darkness. These sanguinary raids were continually in progress, as every tribe, if not planning an onslaught, was, recovering from one, and gathering strength in some fastness, from which they would sally forth to retaliate; when they would watch with superhuman patience, prowling about for months and months, with no thoughts in their

minds but vengeance dire, until their opportunity was found; then, of course, mercy being unknown, such retribution was dealt out as only the brains of such bloodthirsty and ruthless savages could hatch, dismembering their quivering victims atrociously, and carrying away such portions of the reeking carcasses as their individual appetites deemed most toothsome.

The exultant bearing of these murderous savages as they return to the camp, where their women and the weak ones of the tribe had been left, is a sight once seen never to be forgotten. Their brawny and muscular frames swollen out with exultation as they flourish aloft the gory results of their successful expedition, triumphant peans rise from the women and children in shrillest treble, whilst the hoary-headed savages, upon whom time has laid a heavy finger, grunt forth their joy in deepest bass to see the feats of their long-passed youth repeated by their descendants.

Their innate improvidence also militates vastly against their well-being. When food is plentiful they feast and riot to the top of their savage heart, gorging themselves (as certainly none of the brute creation do) until their abdominal regions become so distended as to be decidedly uncomfortable. Not being so learned in medicine as Heliogabalus was, they do not avail themselves of the relief offered by emetics. To remove their discomfort, however, they lay themselves prone on the ground, face downwards, and then get *lyoores*<sup>[2]</sup> suffering less from repletion than themselves to run up and down on their bodies until the desired end is gained, either by expulsion or extension. When this happy result is successfully achieved, they



commence to gorge again, and continue doing so, until the rolling process is once more found necessary to animal comfort, and this continues just so long as the feast lasts.

When the food has come to an end, those who have come out of the feasting ordeal without paying the penalty which outraged nature usually imposes have to turn out to hunt for game to replenish the savage larder, whilst those who have been less fortunate lie in their *loondthals*<sup>[3]</sup>, and groan until old doctor sees fit to step in to their aid.

When they have a superabundance of food they never try to preserve any for future use, but allow everything which they cannot stuff into themselves to go to waste.

Amongst the Murray tribes tons upon tons of fat, delicious fish are permitted every summer to go to decay. To such an extent does this improvidence prevail at times, that the air, becomes so tainted with the effluvium as to be unbearable even to an aborigine, and his olfactories are none of the most sensitive. When the air becomes thus permeated they merely pick up their belongings, and take themselves off to some purer atmosphere, where they camp, until again compelled by reason of vitiated air to remove further afield.

During the winter months they suffer extreme privations. They are too indolent to make themselves good weatherproof huts, so when it rains heavily they are thoroughly drenched, together with all their belongings, even to their bedding, and at such times they will not stir out to look for food, consequently they have to suffer the gnawing pangs of hunger, along with the miseries arising

from their bad huts and severe weather. During these purgatorial times all ages, sexes, and relations huddle up together over a little fire for warmth; they are too lazy even to keep a good fire on at these times. One thinks somebody else should go for firewood, and tells him to do so; he tells another, and so on; consequently the wood is not brought at all. So they lie cold enough, snarling at each other like a pack of discontented dogs. But this is merely an illustration of the axiom which says, "What is everybody's business is nobody's business," applied to aboriginal domestic life. However, it is not a state of things conducive either to health or morality; accordingly they suffer in both cases most perniciously.

At these periods of feasting and privation the seeds of nearly all the diseases to which they ultimately become victims are engendered. The severe wet and cold give rise to affections of the throat and lungs, the latter of which has nearly always a fatal termination. In fact, it is merely a question of time.

Their over-feeding, too, has many ill effects, though perhaps not so many, or so fatal, as those arising from exposure to wet and cold; but chronic dysentery, indigestion, and their innumerable congeners are left behind to tell the tale of indiscriminate gluttony.

It is during the seasons of plenty that the venereal disease is sown broadcast through the native tribes. At those times the friendly tribes muster together in great force. It is no unusual thing to see two or three hundred banded together in one camp, and as intercourse is quite unrestricted between the sexes, it can very easily be

imagined how this foul malady runs riot, and spreads, during such gatherings. Another patent effect of this promiscuous intercourse between the sexes is the prevalence of sterility amongst the women. Few children are born in comparison to the numbers of women in each tribe of a child-bearing age. It is only such natives as are in the habit of living with their wives much apart from their respective tribes who have anything like families. In each tribe there are usually a few of this kind, and it is principally due to them that the race has not come to an end long since.

The foregoing are amongst the principal causes of the paucity of our aborigines, and it is a moot point, and one which will now remain so, whether these causes would not have had the effect of bringing our native tribes to an end, even although European settlement had never reached these shores. It is true that a longer period might have elapsed before the end came, as without doubt the vices which have been engrafted upon their own corrupt nature by the advent of civilisation are materially hastening the final end, and it is extremely problematical whether the means adopted by the Government and the clergy will tend towards the staying of their downward progress, or in any way conserve the remnant of this fast-disappearing people, whose utter annihilation at present seems so imminent.

1. ↑ Loondthal, native hut.
2. ↑ Lyoores, women.
3. ↑ Loondthals, huts.

## CHAPTER II.

CHIEFTAINSHIP. MALES PREPONDERATE IN NUMBERS OVER FEMALES; THE REASONS THEREOF. DISEASE. FOOD.

Unlike other savage races, these people have not any hereditary, or elected chiefs, or rulers of any kind, to whom they can appeal or rely on in times of difficulty or calamity, or who may lead them to battle. This latter, however, is not of much moment, as they are by far too cowardly to fight in an open, straightforward manner, foe to foe, in daylight. Amongst higher races cowardice is held in thorough contempt, but being innate in the character of these people, it may not be so reprehensible after all, consequently should rather be viewed as a peculiarity of race than otherwise, and so be deemed a physical imperfection only, which it doubtless is, else there would be exceptions, and to this rule there is not one even to prove it. The oldest man in a tribe is, to some small extent, looked up to beyond his fellows, but this quasi respect is only apportioned him because of his being able to recount incidents, legends, and thrilling adventures (of which he is invariably the hero) that are beyond the ken of the others, and more than probable only had birth in his own fertile imagination. He, however, carefully dates the period of their occurrence far enough back to preclude the possibility of his being taxed with either plagiarism or romance.

In the long, bright, starry nights these old fellows are to be seen in perfection; it is then that they shine in all their



self-glorification, which may almost be seen exuding from their pores, if their audience be attentive and numerous.

When there chances to be a dozen or two of one tribe camped together, one of these old fellows will get up, nude as he came into the world, with the exception of his waist-belt, which is of the narrowest, place his back to the fire, and with a flourish of his *womera*<sup>[1]</sup> (which he holds in his hand in readiness to emphasise his flowing periods) to attract the attention of his audience, who, nothing loth, subside into silence, and so remain for hours together (with perhaps an occasional ejaculation of wonder), listening with mouths and ears agape to the savage stories of the ancient narrator, who never seems at a loss for matter, and it is only when tired nature asserts herself, that these savage *seances* come to a conclusion.

These legends and histories, and in fact all their knowledge, is kept alive and handed down from one generation to another in this manner; therefore, whatever cannot be woven into an entertaining garb for winter's evening amusement is entirely lost and forgotten. This, therefore, quite accounts for their scarcity of historical lore, and the entire absence of anything like reliable testimony as to their antecedents—that is to say, if we endeavour to trace them back for several generations. Of course, any telling incident, such as a sanguinary midnight conflict, may not be altogether forgotten, even after a lapse of twenty-five years or so, and they will speak freely enough about it in a general way; but it is utterly impossible to get them to individualise or particularise upon the subject, as from the moment of a man's death (no matter how he may have

come to an end) his name is never again spoken, and should there be another in the tribe bearing the same name, as frequently there chances to be, he immediately adopts another name.

Thus, much that would have been valuable information but for this superstitious foible, is totally lost. From this it will be seen that the aborigines are merely a people of the day, that it is their persistent endeavour to forget—unlike other races, whose whole aim, indeed whose every effort, is a straining to remember.

In all the tribes the males preponderate to a very considerable extent; this is not because fewer female children are born, as at birth the sexes are about equal. The mortality amongst the females after the age of puberty is attained, however, is far greater than it is amongst the males, and for this excess there are numerous very cogent reasons, amongst which the fact of their early maternity is not one of the least. We, ourselves, have known frequent instances of girls becoming mothers at the ages of eleven and twelve years, and child-bearing at these tender years entails future infirmities, which carry them off ere they have come to proper maturity; then, again, their husbands convert them into perfect beasts of burden, making them carry loads, sufficient almost to break down a horse, much more a weak woman. Besides that, they ill-use them in a most brutal manner, often, yes, very often, killing them outright in their ungovernable periods of passion. When an accident of this kind happens (we call it accident for mildness, but it is murder, none the less), the other members of the tribe do not pay the least heed to it; it is

only a *lyoore*<sup>[2]</sup> and a husband has a perfect right to chastise his wife even unto death; the loss is not a tribal one; at least, it is not considered so, as it only effects the individual, and he soon discovers that it does so, for when his fire requires replenishing, or his *coolamen*<sup>[3]</sup> requires filling, he has to do them himself, or go cold and thirsty.

Wanton profligacy is another fertile source of disease and death amongst the women. We know that in general it is supposed that the venereal disease amongst the aborigines is entirely due to the Europeans, but a greater error than this never had promulgation, for long before the advent of the white man it was one of the greatest scourges this primitive people had to bear. The probabilities are that the trepang-hunting Malays and Chinese first introduced it on the Northern coast centuries ago, from whence it spread from one tribe to another, until the disease became a national calamity. The women being constitutionally weaker than the men, therefore less able to run away and hide during the frequent midnight massacres, are more liable to fall into the clutches of their relentless foes than the men; besides, at those times of extreme peril, they become perfectly paralysed with terror, and thus fall an easy prey to the ruthless assassins. The victims, therefore, of these slaughters are most frequently females, and children of tender years, or old, bed-ridden men. Such a thing as a chivalrous protection during these panics, or indeed at tiny other time, is quite unknown; in fact, it would be deemed derogatory to manhood to run the slightest personal risk for any such quixotic purpose; but then in all phases of aboriginal life self-preservation is the only law. Everything

they do, in short, is done instinctively; they never by any chance arrive at a conclusion by sheer force of logical reasoning.

There seems to be a perfect absence of diseases having a contagious nature, such as fevers, &c. With the exception of occasional visits from influenza, which seldom has a fatal termination, they are altogether exempt. During winter, 'tis true, they are very much subject to a kind of scurvy, which, from its prevalence, might be deemed contagious but we are inclined to imagine that it partakes more of a venereal character, and each break out is due to lack of nutritious food, combined with cold, wet lodgings. As the mild spring advances, and food becomes plentiful, this distemper gradually leaves them, and by summer their skins have returned to their normal sleekness, with a glossiness truly wonderful, considering the quantity of blotches with which they were marred during winter.

All the very old men in the colony show distinct smallpox traces. In speaking of this scourge, they say that it came with the waters—that is, it flowed down the rivers in the early flood season, laying its death-clutch on every tribe in its progress, until the whole country became perfectly decimated by the fell disease. During the earlier stages of its ravages the natives gave proper sepulture to its victims, but at last the death-rate became so heavy, and the panic so great, that burying the bodies was no longer attempted. The survivors merely moved their camps daily, leaving the sick behind to die, and the dead to fester in the sun, or as food for the wild dogs, and carrion loving birds to fatten upon, until in a short time the whole atmosphere



became impregnated with the foetid odours arising from the decomposing carcasses. The poor creatures began to think that not one would escape death, and had altogether arrived at such a profound depth of misery through this foul destroyer as to feel indifferent whether they lived or died.

From what we have been able to glean from the native son, the subject of this disease, we are inclined to think that it must have come from Sydney, and if about forty or fifty years since the inhabitants of that city underwent the ordeal of this plague, there cannot be any doubt remaining on the subject. When the bright, torrid summer displaced the moister spring, the disease gradually died out, or had run its course, leaving but a sorry remnant of the aborigines behind, and it was years before the panic then caused was even partially forgotten. To this day the old men speak of it shudderingly, and with such an amount of loathing horror, as it is impossible for any other evil to elicit from, their inherent stolidity.

This small-pox infliction seems to be the only occasion (of which they have any knowledge) upon which great numbers died together, from one cause. It is therefore not to be wondered at if the survivors do look back upon the scourge with feelings of profound dread.

The natives attributed this pestilence to the malign and magical machinations of tribes with whom they were not on terms of amity; that, however, is only a matter of course, since they ascribe all the ills with which Nature smites them to the same source.

Their food consists of fish principally, and of which for about eight months in the year they have abundance; so

large, indeed, is their supply during those months, they cannot nearly consume it, consequently quite a moiety is allowed to go to waste.<sup>[4]</sup>

To supplement the fish, they have kangaroo, emu, opossum, and wallaby, and besides these nearly every kind of aquatic bird is found in the greatest profusion on the lakes and lagoons. The latter they capture in immense numbers by the aid of nets, manufactured for that purpose only, and during the breeding season they get eggs by the thousand. The canoes arriving at the camps at that time are literally laden down to the water's edge with eggs only; they are heaped up at both ends until there is barely room for the native to stand and paddle. It is of but small moment to them whether the eggs have birds in them or not; they are consumed with a relish all the same, be they fresh or stale.

A species of flag, having a farinaceous root, called by the natives *kumpung*, grows in abundance by the margin of all the great rivers and lakes; it makes a very palatable and nutritious food, of which the natives are justly fond. It can be procured in abundance, but as it requires considerable labour to dig, much less of it is procured than its manifold merits warrant. The flower stem of this flag is also eaten when young; a foot or eighteen inches long is the best size. It is very insipid to European palates, and we fancy it contains but a small modicum indeed of nutritious matter; however, the natives are extremely partial to it, and therefore consume it in vast quantities. In this green stage it is termed by the aborigines *ioonty*. The common, small flowered yellow water-lily, which so plentifully fringes most of the colonial lakes and lagoons, is another source from

whence they derive a desirable addition to their diet. The roots of this plant are formed of many tubers, of about an inch and a half long by half an inch in diameter. The root of one plant will frequently yield as many tubers as a half-pint measure will contain. They are baked before being eaten, and are of a sweet mawkish taste, very gluey in appearance, not unlike what is termed a waxey potato. They are called *lahoor* by the natives.

The sow thistle, dandelion yam, and a trefoil which grows on country which at times is inundated during their respective seasons are consumed in vast quantity. To see the *lyoores*<sup>[5]</sup> approaching the camp in the evenings, with each a great bundle of these green forage plants on her head, a stranger to their customs would imagine that they were providing the nightly fodder for a dairy of cows. They eat these herbs in a raw state by way of salad; the *ioonty* is also eaten uncooked.

Besides these they eat the larvae of several kinds of ants, some of which are tree-inhabiting insects, others are mound-raising ground ants. An immense grub also they consume in large quantities; it is two or three inches in length, and is found deep in the wood of the gum-tree. The natives are very expert in finding the trees in which these grubs are; in fact, they never err; yet to a casual observer, or even one with some acuteness, there is not the slightest difference in the appearance of a tree containing numberless grubs and one without any. These grubs are eaten with great relish, either cooked or raw.

During winter they are not in the least choice as to their food; anything having life, no matter how repulsive to

European notions it may be, is most acceptable. At that time frogs are deemed good, snakes<sup>[6]</sup> most toothsome, and the abominable fetid wild dog is esteemed a luxury of the highest order.

1. ↑ Womera: Throwing stick. This instrument is used for propelling the lighter spears. It is also invariably employed by aboriginal orators whilst speaking, to give effect to their eloquence.
2. ↑ Lyoore: Woman.
3. ↑ Coolamen: Water vessel.
4. ↑ This is only applicable to the aborigines who inhabit the Northern frontier of the colony. With the exception of the too bountiful supply of fish, however, the food of the natives all over the colony is pretty much of the same character.
5. ↑ Lyoore: Woman.
6. ↑ It may seem an anachronism to speak of snakes as an article of food in the winter time, but it is not so, as the aborigine with his savage cunning knows when and where to catch the reptile napping during the season of hybernation.



### CHAPTER III.

OF THE MARRIAGE RELATIONS AND POLYGAMY; LACK OF CHASTITY AND ITS CAUSES; OF WIDOWS AND THEIR DISPOSAL; CHILDREN AND THEIR TRAINING; OF THE RED OCHRE, WITH WHICH THEY PAINT THEMSELVES, AND HOW OBTAINED; THE WATER-YIELDING ROOT, WHEN AND HOW UTILISED; OF DRESS AND ORNAMENT; PRACTICES ON ATTAINING THE AGE OF PUBERTY, AND PRIOR THERETO; PHYSICAL CAPACITY.

Their marriage relations are of the most primitive and simple character, the noun love being entirely absent from their vocabulary. Nothing in the shape of courting or company-keeping is practised by the prospective bridegroom and bride. The bridegroom and father, or guardian, as the case may be, of the intended bride, come to a proper understanding, and the latter simply desires the *mooroongoor*<sup>[1]</sup> to pick up her belongings, and take herself off to the *loondthal* of her future lord and master. Should she demur, as is not infrequent, the coercion of a waddy is resorted to, and it seldom fails to have the desired effect. There are not any ceremonies connected with this tin; it is merely a matter of mating, still it is binding enough, at least, so far as the woman is concerned. The man at any time, however, can cut the knot, and send the woman back to her people, by whom she is received readily enough, and there is not any trouble or bother about it. There may perhaps be a slight coolness displayed by the father or other guardian of the girl, towards her sometime husband for a few days, but further than this there is no dispute or quarrel on the subject of the slight. The fact that their language is altogether guiltless of a synonym for that noun, may account for their calmness under the circumstances.

The girl, of course, is again ready to be disposed of to the first eligible aspirant who may offer, even although her first matrimonial venture had resulted in the production of an infant. Her new lord has to take the encumbrance, which he does, and feels proud, too, of what will in the future be deemed his putative paternity. Polygamy is allowed to any extent, and the rule is generally taken advantage of by those who chance to be rich in sisters, or female wards, to give in exchange for wives. No man can get a wife unless he be the possessor of a sister or ward, whom he can give in exchange. Fathers of grown-up sons frequently exchange their daughters for wives to themselves, even although they had two or three before, instead of allowing their sons to do so. Cases of this kind are very hard indeed, but, being aboriginal law, they cannot be controverted, nor will the elders of a tribe permit the young men to go off to other tribes to steal wives for themselves, as such measures would be the certain means of entailing endless feuds, and much bloodshed in the attempts that would surely be made with the view of recapturing the abducted women. Young men, therefore, not having any female relatives under their control must necessarily live all their lives in single blessedness, unless they choose to take up with withered old hags whom nobody owns, merely to have their fires cared for, their water-vessels filled, and their baggage carried from camp to camp. This ill-assorted kind of engagement, however, is not of very frequent occurrence, as the young men are too much afraid of the ridicule which their more fortunate fellows would surely shower upon their uxorious heads.

In their matrimonial alliances great deference is paid to consanguinity, the very slightest blood relationship being a definite barrier to that connexion. In their sexual intercourse, however, they are not in the least bit particular, consequently incest of every grade is continually being perpetrated. Chastity is quite unknown amongst them, and it is a hopeless task endeavouring to make them understand the value of that virtue. In speaking to them on this not very choice subject, they point to all the animals in nature, and say, "These are not restricted in any way, why then should we be?" They say all such trammels and prohibitions may be quite correct as regards white men, but not being in accordance with aboriginal ethics, and never having been practised by any of their progenitors, they cannot see why they should (merely because a white man bids them) ignore that which their forefathers deemed good from the very earliest times, and which they themselves feel to be innate. Of course, to arguments of this kind, and so put, especially when your opponent is an untaught and nearly unteachable savage, there is no possibility of reply. We can therefore only shrug our shoulders and pity the poor, ignorant child of nature.

Much of this absence of chastity is due to the promiscuous manner they have of huddling up together in their *loondthals*, and to the coarse, obscene, and lewd character of the stories in listening to which they spend so much of their time round the camp fires at night. All their facetiæ, too, are of the same broad, gross nature. Were they not so they would fail to meet with the appreciative audiences which silently sit for hours together, with mouths