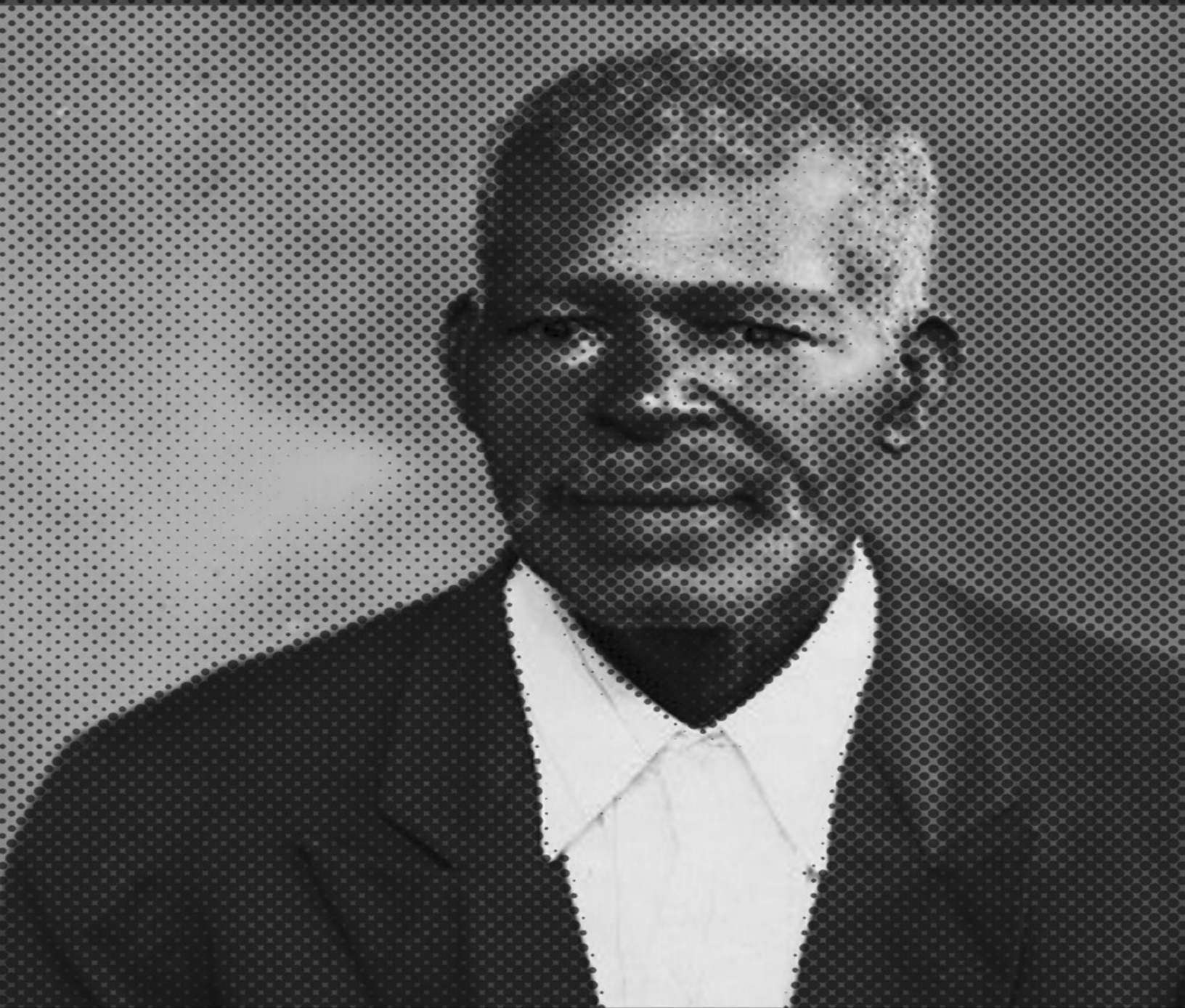


Charles White



***The Story
of the Blacks***

Charles White

The Story of the Blacks



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338099457

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTORY.

Chapter I.—Dampier's Account.

Chapter II.—Cook's Account.

Chapter III.—GOVERNOR PHILLIP'S EXPERIENCES.

CHAPTER IV.—The Racial War Begins.

CHAPTER V.—Flinders' Account.

CHAPTER VI.—Governor Macquarie's System.

CHAPTER VII.—First Experience with the Interior Tribes.

CHAPTER VIII.—The Darling Blacks.

Sir Thomas Mitchell's Expeditions.

Murder of Cunningham, The Botanist.

CHAPTER IX.—Dr. Leichhardt's Experiences.

CHAPTER X.—THE MURDER OF KENNEDY, THE EXPLORER.

CHAPTER XI.—A Few Massacres.

The Wreck Of The Maria.

Settler Greig—His Murderers and Avengers.

WHOLESALE SLAUGHTER BY THE POLICE.

THE MASSACRE AT DANGAR'S STATION.

WHOLESALE POISONING.

CHAPTER XII.—The Border Police.

CHAPTER XIII.—TROUBLES IN PORT PHILLIP.

SLAUGHTER OF WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN.

CHAPTER XIV.—The South Australian Tribes.

CHAPTER XV.—THE WEST AUSTRALIAN TRIBES.

CHAPTER XVI.—The Queensland Tribes.

CHAPTER XVII.—THE WAR OF EXTERMINATION IN VAN
DIEMEN'S LAND.

CHAPTER XVIII.—FORMAL TRIALS OF NATIVES FOR MURDER.

CHAPTER XIX.—PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
ABORIGINES.

CHAPTER XX.—Marriage Customs.

CHAPTER XXI.—MOTHERHOOD and CHILDHOOD.

CHAPTER XXII.—CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH.

CHAPTER XXIII.—THE MAN-MAKING CEREMONY.

CHAPTER XXIV.—LIFE IN THE CAMP.

CHAPTER XXV.—WEAPONS AND IMPLEMENTS.

CHAPTER XXVI.—Food, and Their Methods of Procuring It.

CHAPTER XXVII.—The Practice Of Cannibalism.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—Clothing And Ornaments.

CHAPTER XXIX.—The Corroboree or National Song Dance.

CHAPTER XXX.—Signs And Signals. Barter, Mimicry, &c.

POWERS OF MIMICRY.

CHAPTER XXXI.—The Natives As Trackers.

CHAPTER XXXII.—Their Superstitions And Traditions.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—Diseases And Their Treatment.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—Burials And Mourning.

CHAPTER XXXV.—Tribal Wars.

CHAPTER XXXVI.—Black Bloodhounds—The Native Police.

CHAPTER XXXVII.—Attempts To Civilize And Christianise.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.—Decimation And Extinction.

THE END.

INTRODUCTORY.

[Table of Contents](#)

The black race of Australia will in a short time be but a memory, for the final issue in the unequal struggle between the white man and his coloured brother is not far off, and the last chapter of the history of the aborigines is even now being written.

In dealing with this subject I do not purpose devoting much time to speculation concerning their origin; that is a division in which the general reader could not be expected to take any interest, howsoever attractive it may be to scientists. My aim has been to place before the reader a simple narrative of facts illustrative of the life of the Australian blacks in their savage state, and the condition of semi-civilization into which many of them were brought by their contact with the white man after possession of the land was taken by Governor Phillip and the motley crowd that crossed the sea from England with him to form a British settlement on this far-off Australian shore. My information has been gathered from many sources, direct and indirect, and throughout the long search for reliable material upon which to work there has ever been present with me a feeling of profound regret that the opportunity for compiling an exhaustive, succinct and reliable account of the original inhabitants of these lands should have been allowed to pass away with the lives of the men who might have seized it and made better use of it, by reason of the then intimate relationship with them, than even more competent historians can possibly do at the present day. For years after

the first settlement of the colony the authorities were too much concerned with regulating the lives of worse savages than the natives to give attention to a work so insignificant as that of studying the life of the dark-skinned mortals upon whose land they had settled—too eager to wring blood from manacled humanity of their own cast of countenance and colour of skin—too much absorbed in the task of European settlement, to care whether the race that was being exterminated was worth a thought. And to-day the position stands thus: The aborigines as a race have been practically civilized off the face of the earth which was their inheritance, and those who occupy the land once theirs are like to forget that ever a black man lived upon the soil.

When the sight of the natives was striking because of its novelty a few sentences were written from which can be gathered what the men who saw them first thought of them; but mere impressions do not make up reliable history, and only such of the statements first made as have been proven true by subsequent dealings with the different tribes can be accepted as of any value whatever. It is well to gather up these earlier records, however, for the men who made them saw the natives in their most natural condition, and had the best opportunity of observing their appearance, habits and customs in their primitive state.

The readers of this story must not expect anything approaching nicety of arrangement in the simple record of facts which I have essayed to place before them. A writer who wished to win a reputation for skill in this direction would require to be put in possession of better material than that which is possible of collection from the incongruous

mass of disjointed narratives, oral and written, which I have gathered during the search of years. My chief concern has been to secure correctness, rather than to preserve uniformity, and I can only hope that any lack of the latter that may make itself apparent will not cause the reader to miss the points of aboriginal character which the facts recorded are intended to illustrate. This much by way of explanation—not apology.

Chapter I.—Dampier's Account.

[Table of Contents](#)

Dampier, the Buccaneer, whose wild exploits in the Indian and Southern seas reads like a romance, was the first to describe the natural history and scenery of Australia, and the habits and customs of the natives. In his journal of adventures in the South Seas, published in London in 1691, appears a narrative of his first visit to the western shores of Australia, when he was on a marauding expedition in the ship *Cygnet*. The description given by him, though by no means flattering, must strike the Australian reader as remarkable for its vividness and fairly correct delineation, and having been written more than two centuries ago, may be looked upon as a curious record of keen observation, although it may not be estimated of surpassing value as a reliable picture of things as they existed at that remote period. His visit was made in January, 1688, and this is the manner in which he recorded some of his observations and impressions:—

"New Holland is a very large tract of land. . . . We saw no sort of animal, nor any track of beast, but once; and that seemed to be the tread of a beast as big as a great mastiff dog. Here are a few small land birds, but none bigger than a blackbird, and but few sea-fowls. Neither is the sea very plentifully stored with fish, unless you reckon the manatee and turtle as such of these creatures there is plenty, but they are extraordinarily shy, though the inhabitants cannot trouble them much, having neither boats nor iron.

"The inhabitants of this country are the miserablest people in the world. The Hodmadods of Monomatpa, though a nasty people, yet for wealth are gentlemen to these; who have no houses and skin garments, sheep, poultry, and fruits of the earth, ostrich eggs, &c., as the Hodmadods have; and setting aside their shape, they differ but little from brutes. They are tall, straight-bodied and thin, with small long limbs. They have great heads, round foreheads, and great brows. Their eye-lids are always half closed, to keep the flies out of their eyes; they being so troublesome here that no fanning will keep them from coming to one's face, and without the assistance of both hands to keep them off they will creep into one's nostrils and mouth too, if the lips are not shut very close; so that from their infancy being thus annoyed with these insects they do not open their eyes as other people; and therefore they cannot see far unless they hold up their heads as if they were looking at something over them. They have great bottle-noses, pretty full lips, and wide mouths; the two fore-teeth are wanting in all of them, men and women, old and young; whether they draw them out I know not; neither have they any beards. They are long visaged, and of a very unpleasing aspect, having no one graceful feature in their faces. Their hair is black, short and curled, like that of the Negroes, and not long and lank like the common Indians. The color of their skin, both of their faces and the rest of their body, is coal black, like that of the Negroes of Guinea. They have no sort of clothes, but the piece of the rind of a tree tied like a girdle about their waist and a handful of long grass, or three or four small boughs full of leaves, thrust under their girdle

to cover their nakedness. They have no houses, but lie in the open air without any covering; the earth being their bed and the heaven their canopy. Whether they cohabit one man to one woman or promiscuously, I know not; but they do live in companies, 20 or 30 men, women, and children altogether.

"Their only food is a small sort of fish, which they get by making wares of stones across little coves or branches of the sea; every tide bringing in a small fish, and there leaving them for a prey to these people, who constantly attend there to search for them at low water. This small fry I take to be the top of their fishery. They have no instruments to catch great fish should they come, and such seldom stay to be left behind at low water; nor could we catch any fish with our hooks and lines all the time we lay there. In other places at low water they seek for cockles, mussels, and periwinkles; of these shell fish there are fewer still, so that their chiefest dependence is upon what the sea leaves in their wares; which be it much or little they gather up, and march to the places of their abode. There the old people who are not able to stir abroad by reason of their age, and the tender infants, await their return; and what Providence has bestowed on them they presently broil on the coals and eat it in common. Sometimes they get as many fish as makes them a plentiful banquet, and at other times they scarce get everyone a taste; but be it little or much that they get, everyone has his part as well the young and tender, the old and feeble, who are not able to go abroad, as the strong and lusty. When they have eaten they lie down until the next low water, and then all that are able to march

out, be it night or day, rain or sunshine, it is all one, they must attend the wares or else they must fast, for the earth affords them no food at all. There is neither herb, root, pulse, nor any sort of grain for them to eat, that we saw; nor any sort of bird or beast that they can catch, having no instruments wherewith to do so. I did not perceive that they did worship anything. These poor creatures have a sort of weapon to defend their ware, or fight with their enemies, if they have any who will interfere with their poor fishery. They did at first endeavour with their weapons to frighten us, who lying ashore deterred them from one of their fishing places. Some of them had wooden swords (boomerangs), others had a sort of lance.

"The sword is a piece of wood shaped something like a cutlass. The lance is a long straight pole sharp at one end, and hardened afterwards by heat. I saw no iron nor other sort of metal; therefore it is probable that they use stone hatchets, as some Indians in America do. These people speak somewhat through the throat, but we could not understand one word that they said."

When the natives first caught sight of the strange visitors they gathered on the shore gazing curiously at the vessel, but when Dampier and a boat's crew landed they suddenly disappeared in the bush. Search was made for three successive days for native houses, but none were found, although the remains of numerous camp fires were seen.

"At last," says Dampier, "we went over to the island, and there we found a great many natives. I do believe there were 40 on one island, men, women, and children. The men at first coming ashore threatened us with their lances and

swords, but they were frightened by firing one gun, which we fired to frighten them. The island was so small that they could not hide themselves, but they much disordered at our landing, especially the women and children, for we went directly to their camp. The lustiest of the women snatched up their infants, ran away howling, and the little children ran after, squealing and howling, but the men stood still. Some of the women and such people as could not go from us, lay still by a fire, making a doleful noise, as if we had been coming to devour them, but when they saw we did not intend to harm them they were pretty quiet, and the rest that fled from us at our first coming returned again. This, their place of dwelling was only a fire, with a few boughs before it, set up on that side the wind was off. After we had been here a little while, the men began to be familiar, and we clothed some of them, designing to have had some service of them for it, for we found some wells of water here, and intended to carry two or three barrels of it aboard; but it being somewhat troublesome to carry to the canoes, we thought to have made these men to have carried it for us, and therefore we gave them some old clothes; to one an old pair of breeches, to another a ragged shirt, to the third a jacket that was scarce worth owning; which yet would have been very acceptable at some places where we had been, and so we thought they might have been with these people. We put them on them, thinking that this finery would have brought them to work heartily for us, and our water being filled in small long barrels, about six gallons in each, which were made purposely to carry water in, we brought these our servants to the wells, and put a barrel on each of their

shoulders for them to carry to the canoe. But all the signs we could make were to no purpose, for they stood like statues, without motion, but grinned like so many monkies, staring one upon another, for these poor creatures seemed not accustomed to carry burthens, and I believe that one of our ship boys of ten years old would carry as much as one of them. So we were forced to carry our water ourselves, and they fairly put the clothes off again, and laid them down, as if clothes were only to work in.. .. Those inhabitants who lived on the main would always run away from us; yet we took several of them. For they had such bad eyes that they could not see us till we came close to them."

It will be seen later on how very far wrong Dampier was in his estimate of the visual powers of the natives.

In 1699 Dampier again visited Australia, this time the eastern coast, he having previously abandoned his piratical career and obtained a commission from King William III. to make a voyage of discovery. He thus describes his meeting with the natives at Shark's Bay, where the voyagers had landed to search for water:—

"While we were at work (digging in the sand for water) there came nine or ten of the natives to a small hill a little way from us, and stood there menacing and threatening of us, and making a great noise. At last one of them came towards us, and the rest followed at a distance. I went out to meet him, and came within 50 yards of him, making to him all the signs of peace and friendship I could; but then he ran away, neither would any of them stay for us to come nigh them, for we tried two or three times. At last I took two with me, and went in the afternoon along by the seaside

purposely to catch one of them if I could, of whom I might learn where they got their fresh water. There were ten or twelve of the natives a little way off, who, seeing us three going away from the rest of our men, followed us at a distance. . . . Being three or four times our numbers, they thought to seize us. So they dispersed themselves, some going to the sea-shore, and others beating about the sand-hills. We know by what encounter we had with them in the morning that we could easily out-run them; so that a nimble young man that was with me seeing some of them near ran towards them, and they for some time ran away before him; but he soon overtaking them, they faced about and fought him. He had a cutlass and they had wooden lances, with which, being many of them, they were too hard for him. When he first ran towards them I chased two more that were by the shore; but fearing how it might be with my young man, I turned back quickly and went up to the top of a sand-hill, whence I saw him near me, closely engaged with them. Upon them seeing me, one of them threw a lance at me, that narrowly missed me. I discharged my gun to scare them, but avoided shooting any of them; till finding the young man in great danger from them, and myself in some, and that though the gun had a little frightened them at first, yet they had soon learnt to despise it, tossing up their hands and crying "pooh, pooh, pooh"; and coming on afresh with a great noise, I thought it time to charge again and shoot one of them, which I did. The rest seeing him fall made a stand again, and my young man took the opportunity to disengage himself, and come off to me; and I returned back with my men, designing to attempt the

natives no farther, being very sorry for what had happened already. They took up their wounded companion, and my young man, who had been struck through the cheek by one of their lances, was afraid if it had been poisoned; but I did not think that likely. His wound was very painful to him, being made with a blunt weapon; but he soon recovered of it. Among the New Hollanders, whom we were thus engaged with, there was one by his appearance and carriage, as well in the morning as this afternoon, seemed to be the chief of them, and a kind of prince or captain among them. He was a young, brisk man, not very tall, nor so personal as some of the rest, though more active and courageous; he was painted (which none of the rest were at all) with a circle of white paste or pigment (a sort of lime, as we thought) about his eyes, and a white streak down his nose, from his forehead to the tip of it; and his breast and some part of his arms were also made white with the same paint; not for beauty or ornament, one would think, but as some wild Indian warriors are said to do, he seemed thereby to design the looking more terrible; this his painting adding very much to his natural deformity; for they all of them have the most unpleasant looks and the worst features of any people that I ever saw, though I have seen a great variety of savages."

Read in the light of what other explorers have written, the description given by Dampier of the appearance, habits, and customs of the coastal tribes must be taken as fairly correct, and ample evidence could be produced to show that during the time intervening between the last visit of the reformed buccaneer and the occupation of the soil by the First Fleeters—running on to a century—there was very little

change, and the probabilities are that had the natives remained in undisputed possession of the soil until the present day, the same monotonous condition of non-development would have been observed.



Chapter II.—Cook's Account.

[Table of Contents](#)

The next account was that furnished by Captain Cook, whose favourable reports of the country around Botany Bay first induced the British Government to enter upon that work of colonisation in the Southern seas which has borne such marvellous fruit.

The first sign of the natives was observed by the famous circumnavigator when (in 1770) skirting the coast near Port Hacking, when several of them were seen walking briskly along the shore, four of them carrying a canoe across their shoulders. At first he thought they intended to launch the canoe and put off to the ship, but discovering his error he had a boat manned and pulled to the shore with the object of landing, upon seeing which the natives ran away. When subsequently approaching Botany Bay in the pinnace the explorers saw natives on the shore, but as they were armed with "long pikes and a wooden weapon shaped somewhat like a cimeter" (evidently spears and boomerangs) a landing was not attempted. The natives "used many threatening gestures and brandished their weapons; particularly two, who made a very singular appearance, for their faces seemed to have been dusted with a white powder, and their bodies painted with broad streaks of the same colour, which passing obliquely over their breasts and backs, looked not unlike the cross-belts worn by our soldiers; the same kind of streaks were also drawn around their legs and thighs like broad garters; each of these men held in his hand the weapon like a cimeter, which appeared to be about two feet

and a half long, and they seemed to talk to each other with great earnestness."

"The place where the ship had anchored was abreast of a small village, consisting of about six or eight houses; and while we were preparing to hoist out the long boat, we saw an old woman, followed by three children, come out of the wood; she was loaded with firewood, and each of the children carried its little burden; when she came to the houses three more children, younger than the others, came out to meet her; she often looked at the ship, but expressed neither fear nor surprise; in a short time she kindled a fire and the four canoes came in from fishing. The men landed, and having hauled up their boats began to dress their dinner, and to all appearance wholly unconcerned about us, though we were within half a mile of them. We thought it remarkable that all of the people we had yet seen, not one had the least appearance of clothing, the old woman herself being destitute of even a fig-leaf.. . . We intended to land where we saw the people, and began to hope that as they had so little regarded the ship's coming into the bay, they would as little regard our coming on shore. In this, however, we were disappointed; for as soon as we approached the rocks two of the men came down upon them to dispute our landing, and the rest ran away. Each of the two champions was armed with a lance about 10 feet long (war spears called ghe-rubbine), and a short stick (womera) which he seemed to handle as if it was a machine to assist him in managing or throwing the lance. They called to us in a very loud tones and in a harsh dissonant language, of which neither we nor Tupia understood a single word; they

brandished their weapons and seemed resolved to defend their coast to the uttermost, though they were but two, and we were forty. I could not but admire their courage, and being very unwilling that hostilities should commence I ordered the boat to lie upon her oars; we then parlied (parleyed) by signs for about a quarter of an hour, and to bespeak their good-will I threw them nails, beads and other trifles, which they took up, and seemed to be well pleased with. I then made signs that I wanted water, and, by all the means that I could devise, endeavoured to convince them that we would do them no harm. They now waved to us, and I was willing to interpret it as an invitation; but upon our putting the boat in, they came again to oppose us. One appeared to be a youth about nineteen or twenty, and the other a man of middle age; as I had now no other resource, I fired a musket between them. Upon the report, the youngest dropped a bundle of lances upon the rock, but recollecting himself in an instant, he snatched them up again with great haste. A stone was then thrown at us, upon which I ordered a musket to be fired with small shot, which struck the eldest upon the legs, and he immediately ran to one of the houses, which was distant about 100 yards. I now hoped that our contest was over, and we immediately landed; but we had scarcely left the boat when he returned, and we then perceived that he had left the rock only to fetch a shield or target for his defence. As soon as he came up, he threw a lance at us, and his comrade another; they fell where we stood thickest, but happily hurt nobody. A third musket with small shot was then fired at them, upon which one of them threw another lance, and both immediately ran

away; if we had pursued we might probably have overtaken one of them; but Mr. Banks suggesting that the lances might be poisoned, I thought it not prudent to venture into the woods. We repaired immediately to the huts, in one of which we found the children, who had hidden themselves behind a shield and some bark; we peeped at them, but left them in their retreat, without their knowing that they had been discovered, and we threw into the house, when we went away, some beads, ribbons, pieces of cloth, and other presents, which we hoped would procure us the goodwill of the inhabitants when they should return, but the lances which we found lying about we took away with us, to the number of about 50; they were from six to fifteen feet long, and all of them had four prongs in the manner of a fish-gig, each of which was pointed with fish-bone, and very sharp; we observed that they were smeared with a viscous substance of a green colour, which favoured the opinion of their being poisoned, though we afterwards discovered that it was a mistake; they appeared, by the sea-weed that we found sticking to them, to have been used in striking fish. Upon examining the canoes that lay upon the beach, we found them to be the worst we had ever seen; they were between 12 and 14 feet long, and made of the bark of a tree in one piece, which was drawn together and tied up at each end, the middle being kept open by sticks, which were placed across them from gunwale to gunwale as thwarts."

Repeated efforts were made by the landing party during successive days to get into close touch with the natives, but without success, although the latter repeatedly came within hailing distance of the place where the water casks were

being filled. The toys placed in the gunyahs were left untouched, the natives evidently fearing to handle them. During his excursions into the bush ("up into the country" are the words used in his diary) Cook made close observation of everything calculated to throw light upon their habits and manner of life, thus recorded:—

"We saw many houses (gunyahs) and places where they had slept upon the grass, of which there is great abundance, without any shelter, but we saw only one of the people, who, the moment he saw us, ran away. At all these places we left presents hoping that at last they might procure confidence and goodwill.. . . We saw the dung of an animal which fed upon the grass, and which we judged could not be less than a deer; and the footsteps of another which was clawed like a dog, and seemed to be about as big as a wolf (evidently the animals were the kangaroo and the dingo or wild dog).. . . We found some wood which had been felled by the natives with a blunt instrument, and some that had been barked, . . . and in some of them (the trees) steps had been cut at about three feet distant from each other, for the convenience of climbing them. Fell in with a body of two and twenty natives, who followed us, and often not more than twenty yards distant. When Mr. Gore perceived them so near he stopped and faced about, upon which they stopped also, and when he went on again continued their pursuit. They did not, however, attack him, although they were all around with lances, and he and the midshipman got in safety to the watering-place. The Indians, who had slackened their pursuit when they came in sight of the main body of our people, halted at about the distance of a quarter

of a mile, where they stood still. Mr. Monkhouse and two or three of the waterers took it into their heads to march up to them; but seeing the Indians keep their ground till they came pretty near them, they were seized with a sudden fear very common to the rash and foolhardy, and made a hasty retreat. This step, which insured the danger that it was intended to avoid, encouraged the Indians, and four of them running forward, discharged their lances at the fugitives with such force, that flying no less than forty yards, they went beyond them. As the Indians did not pursue, our people, recovering their spirits, stopped to collect their lances; upon which the Indians, in their turn, began to retire.

"Twelve canoes, in each of which was a single Indian, came towards the watering place, and were within half a mile of it a considerable time; they were employed in striking fish, upon which, like others that we had seen before, they were so intent that they seemed to regard nothing else.. . When we returned to the boat, we saw some smoke upon another part of the coast (Tom Ugly's Point), and went thither in hopes of meeting with the people, but at our approach these also ran away. We found six small canoes, and six fires very near the beach, with muscles roasting upon them, and a few oysters lying near; by this we judged that there had been one man in each canoe, who, having picked up some shell fish, had come ashore to eat them, and made his separate fire for that purpose. We tasted of their cheer, and left them in return some strings of beads, and other things which we thought would please them.. . Mr. Monkhouse, the surgeon, and one of the men, who were with another party near the watering-place, also

strayed from their companions, as they were coming out of a thicket, observed six Indians standing together, at the distance of about fifty yards. One of them pronounced a word very loud, which was supposed to be a signal, for a lance was immediately thrown at him out of the wood, which very narrowly missed him. When the Indians saw that the weapon had not taken effect, they ran away with the greatest precipitation; but on turning about the place whence the lance had been thrown, he saw a young Indian, whom he judged to be about nineteen or twenty years old, come down from a tree, and he also ran away with such speed as made it hopeless to follow him.. . On these banks of sand and mud there are great quantities of oysters, muscles, cockles, and other shell fish, which seem to be the principal subsistence of the inhabitants, who go into shoal water with their little canoes, and pick them out with their hands. We did not observe that they ate any of them raw, nor did they always go on shore to dress them, for they had frequently fires in their canoes for that purpose. They do not, however, subsist wholly upon this food, for they catch a variety of other fish, some of which they strike with gigs, and some they take with hook and line. All the inhabitants that we saw were stark naked; they did not appear to be numerous, or live in societies, but like other animals, were scattered along the coasts and in the woods. Of their manner of life, however, we could know but little, as we were never able to form the least connection with them; after the first contest at our landing, they would never come near enough to parley; nor did they touch a single article of

all that we had left at their huts, and the places they frequented, on purpose for them to take away."

During the whole time of their stay at Botany Bay (nine days) the party could not obtain friendly intercourse with the natives, but upon landing at Broken Bay, they came into closer touch with them by supplying them with fish. When the novelty had worn off, however, and the natives had satisfied their curiosity concerning the men and things so strange to them, the familiarity became dangerous to the visitors and an open rupture occurred. A party of blacks, who had previously been presented with some fish (other food offered they would not touch) attempted to carry off some of the turtles that had been caught by the crew, and upon being forcibly prevented they became very angry, and one of them snatched a lighted brand from the fire at the European camp and set the long grass on fire in several places. The fire spread with great rapidity, and much difficulty was experienced in saving the tents and stores on shore. By way of reprisal a shot gun was discharged amongst them, and one black fell, while the visitors returned to the ship, from which they saw the flames spreading for miles along the coast. Writing of this experience Cook says:—

"If it had happened a very little while sooner, the consequence might have been dreadful; for our powder had been aboard for a few days, and the store tent, with many valuable things which it contained, had not been removed many hours. We had no idea of the fury with which grass would burn in this hot climate, nor consequently of the difficulty of extinguishing it; but we determined, that if it

should ever again be necessary for us to pitch our tents in such a situation, our first measure should be to clear the ground around us."

At the close of his interesting narrative Cook makes the following general observations:—

"The number of inhabitants in this country appears to be very small in proportion to its extent. We never saw so many as thirty of them together but once, and that was at Botany Bay, when men, women and children assembled upon a rock to see the ship pass by; when they manifestly formed a resolution to engage us, they never could muster above 14 or 15 fighting men, and we never saw a number of their sheds together that would accommodate a larger party. It is true, indeed, that we saw only the seacoast of the eastern side; and that, between this and the western shore there is an immense tract of country wholly unexplored; but there is great reason to believe that this immense tract is either wholly desolate, or at least still more thinly inhabited than the parts we visited. It is impossible that the inland country should subsist inhabitants at all seasons without cultivation; it is extremely improbable that the inhabitants of the coast should be totally ignorant of arts of cultivation, which were practised inland; and it is equally improbable that, if they knew such arts, there should be no traces of them among them. It is certain we did not see one foot of ground in a state of cultivation in the whole country, and therefore it may well be concluded, that where the sea does not contribute to feed the inhabitants, the country is not inhabited. The only tribe with which we had any intercourse we found where the ship was careened; it consisted of one-

and-twenty persons, twelve men, seven women, one boy, and one girl; the women we never saw but at a distance, for when the men came over the river they were always left behind. The men, here and in other places, were of middle size, and in general, well made, clean limbed, and remarkably vigorous, active, and nimble; their countenances were not altogether without expression, and their voices were remarkably soft and effeminate. They appeared to have no fixed habitations, for we saw nothing like a town or village in the whole country. Their houses, if houses they may be called, seemed to be formed with less art and industry than any we had seen, except the wretched hovels at Tierra del Fuego, and in some respects they are inferior even to them. At Botany Bay, where they were best, they were just high enough for a man to sit upright in, but not large enough for him to extend himself in his whole length in any direction; they are built with pliable rods about as thick as a man's finger, in the form of an oven, by sticking the two ends in the ground, and then covering them with palm leaves and broad pieces of bark; the door is nothing but a large hole at one end opposite to which the fire is made, as we perceived by the ashes. Under these houses, or sheds, they sleep, coiled up with their heels to their heads, and in this position one of them will hold three or four persons. As we advanced northward and the climate became hotter, we found these sheds still more slight; they were built, like the others, of twigs, and covered with bark; but none of them were more than four feet deep, and one side was entirely open; the close side was always opposed to the course of the prevailing wind, and opposite to the

open side was the fire, probably more as defence from the mosquitoes than the cold. They were set up occasionally by a wandering horde in any place that would furnish them for a time with subsistence, and left behind them when, after it was exhausted, they went away; but in places where they remained only for a night or two, they slept without shelter, except the bushes and grass, which is here near two feet high. The only furniture belonging to these houses that fell under our observation, is a kind of oblong vessel made of bark, by the simple contrivance of tying up the two ends with a withy, which not being cut off serves for a handle; these we imagine were used as buckets to fetch water from the spring, which may be supposed sometimes to be at a considerable distance. They have, however, a small bag, about the size of a moderate cabbage-net, which is made by laying thread loop within loop, somewhat in the manner of knitting used by our ladies to make purses. This bag the man carries loose upon his back by a small string which passes over his head. It generally contains a lump or two of paint or resin, some fish-hooks and lines, a shell or two, out of which their hooks are made, a few points of darts, and their usual ornaments, which includes the whole worldly treasure of the richest man among them. Their fish hooks are very neatly made, and some of them are exceedingly small. For striking turtle they have a peg of wood, which is about a foot long, and very well bearded; this fits into a socket at the end of a staff of light wood, about as thick as a man's wrist, and about seven or eight feet long; to the staff is tied one end of a loose line about three or four fathoms long, the other end of which is fastened to the peg. To strike

the turtle, the peg is fixed into the socket, and when it has entered his body, and is retained there by the barb, the staff flies off and serves for a float to trace their victim in the water; it assists also to tire him, till they can overtake him with their canoes, and haul him ashore. One of these pegs, as I have already mentioned, we found buried in the body of a turtle, which had healed up over it. Their lines are from the thickness of a half-inch rope to the fineness of a hair, and are made of some vegetable substance, but what particular we had no opportunity to learn. Their food is chiefly fish, though they sometimes contrive to kill a kangaroo, and even birds of every kind notwithstanding they are so shy that we found it difficult to get within reach of them with a fowling piece. The only vegetable that can be considered as an article of food is the yam; yet doubtless they eat the several fruits that have been mentioned among other productions of the country; and indeed we saw the shells and hulls of several of them lying about the places where they had kindled their fires."

I have drawn somewhat extensively from the diary of this intrepid explorer (whose death at the hands of the Sandwich Islanders, in 1779, was a loss to the world) for the simple reason that the account given by him—at once graphic, accurate, and simple—is the first through which we obtain a clear insight into the character of the aborigines before the country was occupied by Europeans. Cook's writings prove that he considered ethnological description of the races inhabiting the country he visited to be quite as important as that of geological bearings and features; and it is very much to be regretted that those who subsequently came into

closer contact with the aborigines did not make record as fully as he did of facts illustrating their habits and customs, while yet they were unlearned in the ways of the race that has supplanted them.



Chapter III.—GOVERNOR PHILLIP'S EXPERIENCES.

[Table of Contents](#)

The old men of the tribes living in the vicinity of Botany Bay and Port Jackson were doubtless still occasionally talking of Cook's visit when the First Fleet, under the command of Governor Phillip, made its appearance off the Australian coast; for eighteen years only had intervened, and it was a circumstance which they were not likely to easily forget.

At the very first landing of Governor Phillip on the shore of Botany Bay (January 18th, 1788) an interview with the natives took place. They were all armed, but on seeing the Governor approach with signs of friendship, alone and unarmed, they readily returned his confidence by laying down their weapons. Presents offered by the visitors were readily accepted, and no hostility was shown by the natives while the vessel remained in the bay—thanks, no doubt, to the humane conduct of Cook's people previously, and the friendly overtures of the Governor and his party.

The next interview took place in Sydney Cove, when Phillip had gone round to Port Jackson in search of better quarters. Stockdale describes this meeting in his account of Phillip's voyages. The party of natives appeared near the landing place, being "armed with lances and very vociferous"; but gentle means inspired confidence, and the Governor induced one of the men to accompany him to the spot on the beach where the boatmen were boiling their meat. He examined the pot and its contents critically, and