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*The Aborigines
of Western
Australia*

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PREFACE.

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ANY attempt to fathom the depth of mystery which surrounds the history of the Australian Aboriginal must necessarily be--in the main--a failure. The subject is surrounded with difficulty. Captain Dampier was the first Englishman known to have made the acquaintance of the Australian natives, whom he calls "the poor winking people of New Holland, the miserablest people on earth," and so forth. During the intervening two centuries we have not added much to our knowledge regarding them. They have no written language, and are forbidden to speak of the dead: two serious obstacles to research.

I am well aware that the subject is rather out of my line, and for this reason alone I can scarcely expect to do justice to the theme. Nevertheless, during my wanderings through Western Australia, in the capacity of a mining engineer, I came across a good many of the natives; and taking a profound interest in everything connected with the colony I resolved to set down in brief and simple form such facts as I could glean regarding this most curious specimen of the human race. I lay no more claim to originality than is due to one who has arranged his matter in his own way, and added a few thoughts suggested and accruing.

ALBERT F. CALVERT.

Piccadilly Club, W.

THE ABORIGINES OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.

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REGARDING the aborigines of Western Australia the materials at our disposal are somewhat scanty.

There exists a theory that all savages are the degraded descendants of civilized ancestors, If this be true it seems to me that the Australian Blackboys' period of enlightenment must have existed very far back in the dim twilight of ancient history.

Theories are, as is well known, apt to outrun facts, so I will not try my reader's patience by venturing to discuss the question of "rise or fall," but content myself with the observation that through unnumbered ages there have been wanderers in the desert, side by side with dwellers in cities; and our black Australian brother seems to have descended from the former class. I am likewise led to remark in passing, that our first parents before the fall did not live in a state of civilization, but of ignorance--an ignorance which was undoubtedly bliss,--for ever to be dispelled by the knowledge of good and evil. It was after the fall when they had to work, and became ashamed of their nude condition, that they bethought them of the most primitive modes of dress. Thus did civilization and sin enter the world hand in hand, soon after the creation; and the fig leaf was ancestor to the petticoat.

Among the rudest tribes of men, inhabitants of the wild forests and deserts, dependent for their food and clothing on the accidental produce of the earth or spoils of the