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MAN'S LOWEST EBB.

AMONG THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES.

How the Boys Take the Rite of Manhood—The "First Bite" at Meals.

BY DR. EUGENE STANDER.

The traveler or explorer who visits Australia will soon discover that he has made a serious mistake if he alludes to the black inhabitans as "natives."

This title "natives" belongs, in the opinion of the descendents of the earlier settlers, only to the whites.

The term aborigines, or the name Bushmen, is applied to the original inhabitants. The application of the word "native" to the blacks is looked upon as an insult to the white settlers.

Ethnologists are agreed that in their primitive state savage men are found at the lowest known point of human development in the Australian wilderness. All who have observed these wretched people, even after they have undergone some years of so-called civilizing influence, will agree that nowhere can a more debased and degraded set of human animals be found.

Very little is known of the ethnology or early history of the inhabitants of the great island-continent. Chinese history shows that these people were aware of the existence and position of Australia for centuries before the time of Christ and for at least 2,500 years before its discovery by navigators from western Europe. Beyond a few chance voyages to its north shore however, from which they appear to have been promptly driven by the fierce cannibal aborigine, they seem to have made no attempt to conquer its territory or study its people.

The Malaynesian people to the north and west, probably those from Papua or Borneo, at one time spread over a considerable portion of Australia. This is attested by the fact that in many caves there have in recent years been found picture writings of a grotesque sort that unmistakably belong to these people. Crude as they are, these writings rise far above the powers of the present Australian savages. The Bushmen have no legends to account for these rude heiroglyphics.

There is but little reason, however, to wonder at the isolated condition of these aborigines, and that they remained unconquered, and almost unknown, by their more intelligent neighbors. Indeed, the improved arms, and all other superiorities of modern civilization, have barely sufficed to bring them under subjection after many years of ceaseless struggle.

Even yet we know comparatively little about the Bushmen and their tribes in the dense wilderness of the unamed interior.

When a coastal schooner landed me at Geraldton, on the far west coast of Australia, I had the impression that a trip of a few miles inland would bring me to numerous settlements of the aborigines. Notwithstanding all I had read I did not have it clear in my head that the 3,000,000 savages of a few decades ago had dwindled to less than one-fiftieth that number, that their hatred of the whites kept them far in the interior, and that their habit of building no settled homes, but always on the move, made a visit to them very difficult.

I made a tedious trip of about 350 miles into the desolate interior, beyond Lake Austin, and well over to the edge of the Great Victoria desert, without having discovered a single trace of the savages. Now and then I met a semi-civilized aborigine, but I began to understand that my determination to live for a while with or near these people was easier formed than carried out.

The semi-civilized wretches that I met were indeed a sorry lot. The worst of the Hottentots of Africa, of the Caribs in the interior of Dutch Guiana, or of the Africans of Haiti, are a sufficiently bad lot to make one feel that civilization is hopeless in their case; but they are all physically, intelligently and morally, far beyond and above these degraded creatures.

There semi-civilized Australians whom I met wore clothes, because the laws or rules of the white settlements required them to do so, and because they were given to them. They ate food, because with it they were kept alive. They sought shelter from the night and from storms, because that too prolonged their miserable existence.

But the instinct of self-preservation, the first law of nature as we understand it, had no such place in their lives as in ours.

They had one, and only one, reason for desiring to ward off death, and that great reason was—grog! Enforced prohibition in that region would quickly result in the total extermination of these miserable wretches, who would do nothing to ward off their doom if their beloved rum was taken from them. Nearly starved today, gorged to the very verge of illness tomorrow, exposed to all possible climate chances, they yet imagine that without working for it they are entitled to all the grog they can consume—and that having obtained it they are in possession of civilization's principal and only important blessing! They are utterly worthless at labor, at which they can be kept only so long as is necessary to procure the price of a drink. Only on a hunting trip or cattle round-up do they show any real signs of life.

As is often the case where the edge of civilization is encroaching upon the territory of a savage people, I found the savage a rather less unlovely being than his semi-civilized brother. As he wore fewer clothes, and bathed oftener, he was certainly physically much sweeter, if not more wholesome morally.

The aborigines are a black-brown people, with hanging lower lip, prominent cheek bones, high but narrow foreheads, flattened noses, and very long, coarse black hair. The latter characteristic is their chief difference from African negroes.

I was warned that "spearing white men" was the principal enjoyment of these savages, and I was led to believe that to attempt to live so close to them as to be able to observe their habits would be sure death.

Yet there, as often elsewhere, I found that the Golden Rule was an excellent safeguard and "open sesame," and that it was but necessary to once impress upon them my kindly intentions and willingness to share food with aboriginal visitors, to assure me fair treatment.

In one small community, then dwelling temporarily on the bank of a dried-up stream which, when running, emptied into the salt marshes of the interior, I had the good fortune to be able to speedily cure a lad of a bad thorn wound in the leg that would not heal; also to remove some snag-like teeth from two of the old men and one of the women. These little acts won their confidence as no amount of gold—a well-nigh useless thing to them—could have done. From that time I was as much one of their community as I could endure being.

The trying climate, with its long periods of drouth, and the absence of any of the Ruminati or cattle tribe, must always have made the lives of these Australian aborigines more difficult, and have subjected them to greater hardships than have been known elsewhere outside of the polar zones. The kangaroo is nature's attempt to replace the missing cattle in that region, but the creature is so fleet of foot, and has so little flesh on it when killed, that it is a poor substitute for our milk-giving and burden-bearing source of food.

The scarcity of food has given rise to a degree of selfishness at meals that is far worse than anything to be observed elsewhere. I was a witness to how this shows itself one day.

I had strolled over to their camp just after sending them a wallaby I had shot. So eager were they for food that they had not stopped to more than half cook the flesh, and when I arrived they were already at the feast.

The four men and two youths were sitting huddled closely together, tearing the more toothsome bits of meat from the bone. As soon as a bone was half picked, they carelessly threw it over their shoulders toward where the five women of the party sat together.

The women scrambled for each bone, and when they were done with it there was not a great deal of flesh remaining. Yet what remained was expected to suffice for the dozen or more naked children, from 4 years up to 14, to whom, in turn, the bones were thrown over the shoulders of the women.

This was pretty short allowance for that half-famished horde of youngsters, yet, as five or six half wild dogs struggled and snapped for the bones with them, they did not always get that little.

My half-breed guide and interpreter told me that it never occurred to the parents that it was their duty to see that their children had sufficient food. In fact, were they to become pressed for their own dinners beyond endurance, he thought that one of the fattest of the youngsters would be in grave danger of having to serve in that capacity.

When I first visited the camp one of the boys had not yet been admitted to man's estate and a man's privilege. The period for the ceremonlets of that event arrived which I was told referred to the proof that tunity of witnessing some of the rites.

Neighbors were invited in, and after some talk which I did not understand, but which I was old referred to the proof that the youth had reached a suitable age, or about 18 years, the individual to be honored was led forth from a nearby hut with much ceremony. This was done by two of the older women.

As soon as the boy appeared, three of the men, who were hiding behind bushes,

CLIMBING FOR HONEY.

rushed out, seized him, and carried him off, after a sham battle in which the women appeared to be attempting to rescue him. This is supposed to signify that the mothers prefer to keep their sons as boys or children as long as possible, while the fathers want them to join their ranks as men.

At the place where the lad was taken by the men a number of ceremonials were gone through with. Prominent among these were the removal of the two upper front teeth, as a permanent sign of his manhood, and a severe beating with heavy switches, which he must take stoically. After these ceremonials, which lasted some days, the youth was allowed to join the men in "first bites" at meals, in hunting, and in the privilege of choosing "gins" or wives.

Wild honey enters prominently into the aboriginal food preparation. To get this honey, which abounds in the high gum trees, they adopt a method of climbing which is somewhat different from anything I have seen anywhere else.

Around the tree they weave a strong girdle of flexible vine, making it a little larger than the trunk. This is held nearly shoulder high by the left hand. In the right hand they carry a sort of rude tomahawk. With this tool they cut a series of notches in the bark, which they use as steps, contenting themselves with sufficient room to get a bearing for their strong great toes. As they step up from one notch to the next, they deftly move up the girdle, and then stand ready to cut notches still higher. In this way they safely and swiftly ascend the tallest trees, apparently feeling no uneasiness 150 or more from the ground.

This is almost the only sign of an inventive faculty that these degraded people have; some odd slight-of-hand tricks and other "magic" being all else of the sort that I noticed. But that, as Mr. Rudyard Kipling says, is another story.

BUSHMEN AT MEAL TIME.

THE OLD STONE BELFRY.

A Sunday Night Adventure.

BY FRANCES CHURCHILL WILLIAMS.

"Ralph," said Mr. Kline, as he wearily dropped into a chair in the kitchen, "you'll have to ring the bell tonight; I'm clean played out! The rheumatism's got me again. I lighted up the church and turned the lamps low before I came home; but as for going back again tonight, I can't do it."

"All right, I'll do it," replied Ralph, a sturdy boy of fifteen. "All I'll have to do will be to turn up the lights and ring the bell twice, I suppose."

Mr. Kline had been the sexton and bell-ringer of the old stone church for twenty years, and Ralph Kline had many a time been with him when he opened the church for service, and even had helped him ring the bell. Therefore, though the church was a quarter of a mile from the nearest house, it was with no hesitation that he started out after supper. A bright moon lit up everything, and made the snow sparkle as if strewn with diamonds.

Arrived at the church he pulled the big key from his pocket, unlocked and opened the door and walked in. The body of the church, which was not large, was dimly lit by a dozen lamps which Ralph speedily turned up so that the building was cheerful in a glow of light. Then he walked to the vestry, and, opening a small door at one side, glanced at the nickel clock which was suspended on the wall.

"Five minutes of seven?" he exclaimed to himself. "Time I was ringing!"

The bell at the church was always rung twice, with a period between of ten minutes. Most of the congregation lived at a distance—from a quarter of a mile to a mile or more away. So a "warning bell," as it was called, was rung at five minutes of seven, in the evening, when services began at half past seven, and a second bell at ten minutes after seven. Thus everyone within hearing distance of the church had ample time to make ready if they wished to attend.

Ralph closed the door of the tower room and took off his coat. By lamplight, the bell-rope seemed like some great snake stretched down from above where the darkness hid everything. But Ralph was too accustomed to the interior of the place to think of this. He reached up and took a firm grasp on the rope, threw his weight upon it, and slowly sank toward the floor.

The bell, which was a big one, hung in a cradle, and the bell-rope, passing up into the belfry, was fastened in the groove of a large wheel which, when turned by a pull on the rope, rocked the bell and threw the iron tongue against its sides. The bell was very heavy, and it took a couple of vigorous pulls, even when Mr. Kline himself had hold of the rope, to bring any sound forth.

Twice Ralph pulled and hung upon the rope before the cradle began to move perceptibly. Even then the bell did not ring, and the boy threw all his strength and weight into a third effort.

As he did so, it seemed to him that the rope came toward him much more quickly than it should, and then, before he could let go, it sudenly loosened up above and fell in great spirals to the floor. Fortunately none of the heavy coils struck him; but it gave him a big start, notwithstanding, and he jumped quickly to one side.

There he stood, staring up into the darkness, and wondering what could have happened. Then, realizing that the only way to learn was to go up into the belfry and investigate, he picked up a lantern which stood in a corner, and lighting it at the lamp, started up the ladder which led to the tower above.

It was a long ladder, and climbing it was no easy task. The lantern, as it hung from his arm, banged against him, and cast shifting and uncertain lights. The rungs of the ladder were covered with a thick coating of dust. Yet he toiled slowly on. It seemed as if the ladder never would end. It grew cold, too; for it was freezing outside, and a keen wind blew through the openings in the belfry above.

Presently, however, Ralph struck his head against something, and he knew he had reached the end of his journey. Holding on with one hand, with the other he unfastened the hook which held down the trap door. Pushing this back, he drew himself through the opening, and was in the belfry.

For an instant he rested. Then, shivering as a cold blast of wind swept

HE SWUNG THE LANTERN.

down upon him, he rose to his feet and took up the lantern.

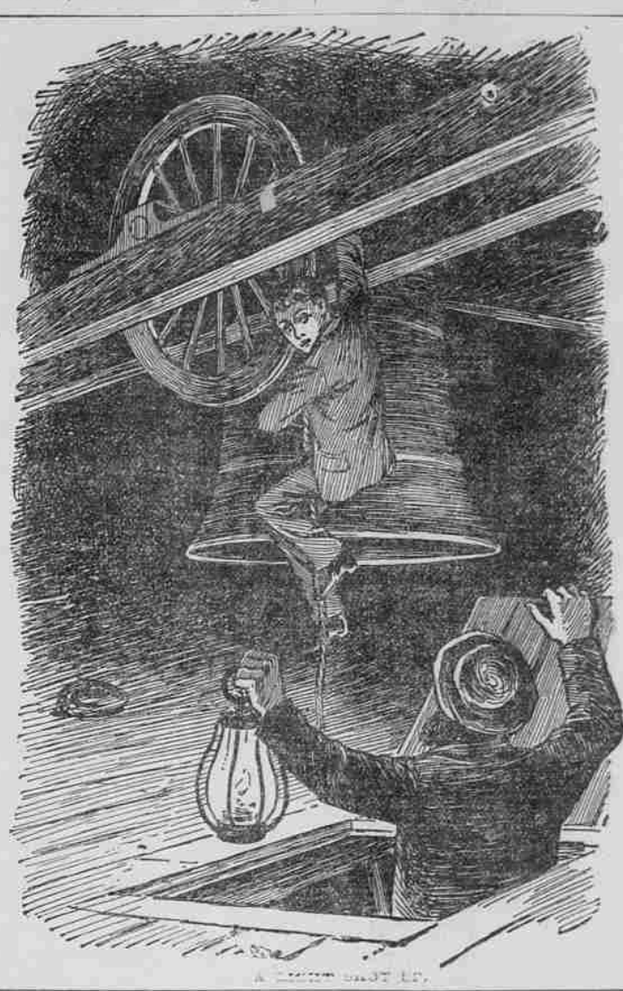
Immediately before him was the rope, dangling from the bell cradle above. Apparently it was all right. It seemed to run properly enough through the hole in the flooring on which he stood. He was about to go down the ladder again, to discover where the break had occurred, when a draft of air stirred the rope, and, as it moved, he saw that it did not go through the hole at all. It came to an end just where it reached the floor.

Ralph placed the lantern beside him and bent down to examine the rope. It seemed to have been severed by some jagged edge, for it was torn and frayed, and bits of hemp strewed the floor near by. He concluded that it must have been worn through by rubbing against the sides of the hole through which it had originally passed.

While he was looking at it he was startled by a sharp squeak at his very elbow. He glanced quickly about, and a bright spark in a dark corner of the belfry caught his eye. He picked up the lantern and swung it in front of him, and a small grey animal darted under a beam. It was a rat.

All at once, Ralph recollected that the old belfry was said to be infested with these animals, and, raising himself he turned to go. As he did so, his foot struck the edge of a floor board and he fell, knocking the lantern over and instantly extinguishing the light.

Somewhat startled now, for the first time, he groped about for the trap door, but could not find it. The moonlight, which came from above, lost itself in the narrow tower, and where he lay it was almost entirely dark. At last, however, his hand came in contact with something which he knew was the trap door; but, even as he touched it, it fell with a bang! He



nervously tried to raise it again but in vain. The door was flush with the floor about it and there was no ring bolt or projection by which to secure a hold on it.

While Ralph was struggling to get a finger beneath the trap door, the same sharp squeak which had startled him before sounded again, and this time it was almost immediately echoed from half a dozen other places.

As he turned about, in every direction there shone in the darkness tiny sparks of light. Ralph knew that these were the eyes of rats, one, or even a couple of the animals he would not have feared. But a dozen of them, boldly surrounding him in this way, in the darkness, sent a shiver down his back. He noted, too, that they did not seem afraid of him, though he banged on the floor and yelled at them. Instead, they grew bolder as their numbers increased, and one of them presently darted across the floor.

Ralph now sprang to his feet and rushed at the enemy. Those in front of him at once retreated, as he could tell by the disappearance of their eyes. But, as he moved several jumped at him from behind and one fastened its teeth in his leg. He kicked wildly at this, and the rat was thrown to one side. Another instantly sprang at him, and then a half dozen at once, a couple of the vicious little animals fastening themselves in his clothes.

Ralph whirled about, dashing his assailants off for a moment. It was only for a moment, however, for he was attacked again immediately, and this time more fiercely than before.

Thoroughly terrified now, he yelled loudly, and kicked and struck out with fists and feet indiscriminately. But his fingers came in contact with the bell rope, which shook with the blow, then swayed into his face again.

At the second blow an idea came to him. He reached out quickly with both hands and grasped the rope, and pulled himself from the floor. Then, with one tremendous kick, he shook off the last of the rats which clung to him, and, hand over hand, raised himself a half dozen feet into the air.

The rope descended slowly with his weight, as the wheel slowly revolved. The bell at last struck a solitary, muffled note, as the tongue fell against its edge. Then it was silent, remaining tilted in the air, and Ralph rested.

But the strain on his arms soon warned him that he could not long stay in his present position, even with his feet twisted about he rope as they were. To go down he did not dare. To go up was the alternative; so slowly he pulled himself higher until his head struck something hard. He quickly put up a hand and felt for the obstacle. A short examination told him that it was a beam. The he remembered that a couple of stout timbers ran across the belfry and gave support to the frame in which hung the bell.

Ralph twisted himself about and tried to force himself between the two beams. But the intervening space would only admit his head and shoulders, and, having worked himself that far upward he found his legs were so confined that he could scarcely move them. He then clutched the rope with one hand, and the most convenient beam with the other, and, for a full minute, remained motionless, resting. Below him, he could hear the rats squeaking, and occasionally he felt the rope shake as some particularly active animal sprang at it.

The movement of the rope suggested a plan to him which promised temporary rest to his arms, and he at once put it into execution. First he lowered himself so that his head was clear of the beams. Then, while he clung fast with one hand, he raised the slack rope below and twisted it about the part from which he hung, so that a loop was made, into which he quickly thrust one leg. It was very difficult work, for the rope was thick and heavy, but when it was done, and he held the rope so that it could not slip, he found he had a fairly comfortable seat.

He now hung some three feet below the cross beams, and, though the rope rose and fell gently for a few minutes, as the cradle above slightly rocked with his motions, no sound came from the bell. There were no sudden pulls on the rope, and consequently the tongue of the bell remained motionless against the bell's edge.

Ralph was content to rest in this way for several minutes. Then a blast of icy wind sweeping down upon his shoulders warned him that he could not remain long where he was. Swung in mid-air, without a coat, he would shortly freeze!

But would any help come?

It seemed unlikely, since only his own family knew that he was at he church, and they would not think it strange if he did not return for a couple of hours.

Neither was it likely that any one would think of coming up into the belfry, unless they should go into the room below and see the fallen rope. Of course there was a chance of this, since there would be curiosity, doubtless, as to why the bell had failed to ring as usual.

Ralph determined that something must be done to attract attention to his place of imprisonment at once. He knew it was useless to call. His voice, cooped up between the narrow walls of the high belfry, would never be heard outside, yell as loudly as he might.

He looked about wildly, and just then a shaft of moonlight gleamed on the curved side of the bell. The bell! —why had he not thought of it before? He reached up quickly, and, after a little effort, succeeded in grasping one of the beams overhead. Then he began swinging on the rope. He had an insecure hold, but within a few minutes his heart leaped as a deep boom rung out from the bell. Harder and harder he worked, and the notes of alarm followed close upon each other. Soon the old bell was ringing out a wild peal and the timbers under his hand vibrated with its movement.

Suddenly, through the clangor of the bell he heard the sound of voices. Then a light shot up from the opened trap door, and a voice called out to know what was the matter. There was a note of alarm in the question; for, this bell ringing, appearently without hands, was enough to make anyone a bit fearful.

Ralph quickly told them how matters stood. He added in warning: "Look out for the rats!"

The man below held a lantern high above his head, and then crawled up on the floor, immediately followed by a companion. Ralph recognized the men as neighbors, and soon descended stiff and cold from his awkward perch.

No rats were to be seen. Frightened by the light and the presence of so many persons the vicious little beasts had retreated.

Ralph did not wait to investigate more. Once down the ladder he told his story to the startled congregation, which had nearly all assembled, and then hurried home.

To this day, however, he never looks at the old stone belfry without a shudder.

RAINY DAY GAMES.

Two Amusing Experiments in "Art For Little People.

BY ELIZABETH PALMER MATHEWS.

A "bogie party" is one of the liveliest of games for small folk. It has been found to make enough fun for a whole long rainy afternoon.

Each child has a well sharpened lead pencil and some large sheets of paper.

When the leader says "All ready!" each player goes into a corner or behind a chair, or under the table—anywhere that will prevent the others from seeing his work.

All have been told by the leader that each is to draw a picture showing his idea of what a "bogie" looks like.

When the leader says "Time's up!" they come out from their corners and compare "bogies." The most ridiculous picture is marked highest, No. 10." The others are marked in proportion down to "No. 1."

When they are tired of drawing they must either redeem their pictures from the leader by paying such forfeits as he chooses to impose, or they may take a vote to see whether in place of paying forfeits they will tie their sheets of pictures together into an album and present it to "Ma."

All this does not "read" as funny as it really is, but children who try the game will have a great frolic.

"Progressive drawing" is another good game. Each child has a pencil. The leader has a big sheet of foolscap paper. He starts off drawing a straight line about two inches long in the middle of this sheet.

The second player draws another line two inches long, joining it to the first line at one or other of the two ends. The third player then adds a line at any angle to suit himself in the manner that he considers the most funny.

By the time four or five lines have been added some one sees that a queer looking figure is being made, and then the lines are placed at every conceivable angle, each trying to add to the fun, and after a while it results in a figure that is like nothing on the earth or under the sea. Wonderful creatures are thus created.

A FORTUNE FROM AN EGG.

BY MARY MAXWELL.

Colonel John Hay, of Washington, Abraham Lincoln's biographer, has a brother, Mr. Charles Hay, who is a rich banker at President Lincoln's old home, Springfield, Ill.

Banker Hay has been mayor of Springfield more than once, and the story which I am going to write about him now is strictly true.

When Banker Hay was a small boy in roundabouts he lived in the village of Warsaw, Ill. One bright spring morning he called upon a kind neighbor who owned a very industrious hen. Master Charles had always been much interested in this particular hen, always so punctually at hen nest, and this morning the kind neighbor presented him with the new laid egg as soon as the hen left the nest.

Master Charles proceeded to ask questions about the egg and became so interested in the whole subject of incubation that before the day was over he went to another neighbor whom he knew had a hen about to set and requested the privilege of placing his egg in her nest.

Master Charlie paid the nest a visit regular every day after school. And lo! in the process of time forth from the egg came a particularly promising little chicken which in turn grew up and laid eggs. These Master Charlie sold or else had "hatched out." With the money for the eggs sold he bought a brood of chickens whenever he could.

With the chicken money a fine calf was bought, which in time became a handsome cow. From profits from her and from the poultry, colts and pigs were bought. Before he knew it young Master Hay was a stock raiser.

In the process of time stock raising became so profitable an employment that the young man had money to invest in unimproved real estate in the city of Springfield.

Not long after he engaged in the real estate business in Springfield. He became influential and wealthy. He met there Banker Ridgeley's pretty daughter and by and by they were married, and he became a banker.

Who can say what further honors may not be in store for Mr. Hay—all due to his brilliant financiering of an egg.

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