



Padiguroo at bay

out the blood as it exudes, into the conjeboi leaf, and continues to saw her gums until she has obtained a considerable quantity of blood, which is then swallowed by the sick man !*

In the thinly wooded plains, and arid country beyond the mountains dividing the eastern and western waters, the blacks experience much greater difficulty in procuring food, and sometimes suffer severely from famine in times of drought; and from this reason the tribes of the interior wander over a much more extensive tract of country than the coast blacks.

Although, from the preceding details, the Australian natives might be deemed the dirtiest savages in the world, with regard to the nature of the food they eat, and their mode of cooking it, yet such is not the case. It is quite true, as many writers have reported, that the produce of the chase, such as opossums, squirrels, pademellas, guanans, ducks, &c. are thrown down unskinned and unembowelled before the fire, and devoured, entrails and all. But having often observed the mode of cookery pursued by the Australian Aborigines, I have never seen them omit to extract the entrails as soon as the animal was warmed through, and they are then carefully cleaned and cooked separately. With regard to the skin being left on, (which is not always the case,) it is purposely done in order to

* Many of the superstitious practices of the American Indians are equally disgusting.

retain the juices of the meat, which would otherwise be dried up by their simple mode of cookery; but as soon as the animal is sufficiently done, the skin is easily pulled off, and rejected. The MacLeay river natives always clean and gut their fish, and cook them carefully on hot embers, and they eat nothing whatever in a raw state, except cobberra and grubs. The Australian Aborigines, therefore, though not remarkably scrupulous as to cleanliness, are, at least, equally so with the less uncivilized New Zealanders, and much more so than many of the African tribes; and their food is, at any rate, not of a more revolting nature than that of other uncivilized communities, such as the blubber and train oil of the Esquimaux, fish in the last stage of putrefaction, which are relished beyond all other food by the Samoyeds, the uncooked horse-flesh of some of the Tartar tribes, and the heterogeneous rubbish devoured by the Boshiesmen, who have even been known to roast and eat the old cast-away shoes of the Dutch boors. So dainty were the blacks at the MacLeay, that I knew them refuse to take any of the flesh of a bullock in fine condition, which was accidentally killed in the bush.

The MacLeay river tribes do not practise so much brutality towards the women as I have seen in other parts of the colony. The girls, as they become marriageable, are either taken by men of the same tribe, or else are sometimes given to those of the neighbouring tribes at the close of some corroberee,

without any violence. In a few rare instances, I have known the females to be forcibly stolen away, but hostilities then, invariably, ensued between the injured tribe and the tribe of the aggressors. None of the women bore those frightful scars and cicatrices, resulting from the blows of their inhuman masters, which scarcely any female in the tribes south of Sydney is exempt from.

It is remarkable, that whilst a great proportion of the men of a tribe are unprovided with '*gins*,' numbers of them are allowed to retain two, and even three. In other respects, a rigid equality is preserved among the different members of the tribe ; thus, if a pair of trowsers, handkerchief, or coat, be given to any black, he is allowed to keep it a certain time, and then it is worn by the others in succession until it is destroyed, or they become tired of it.

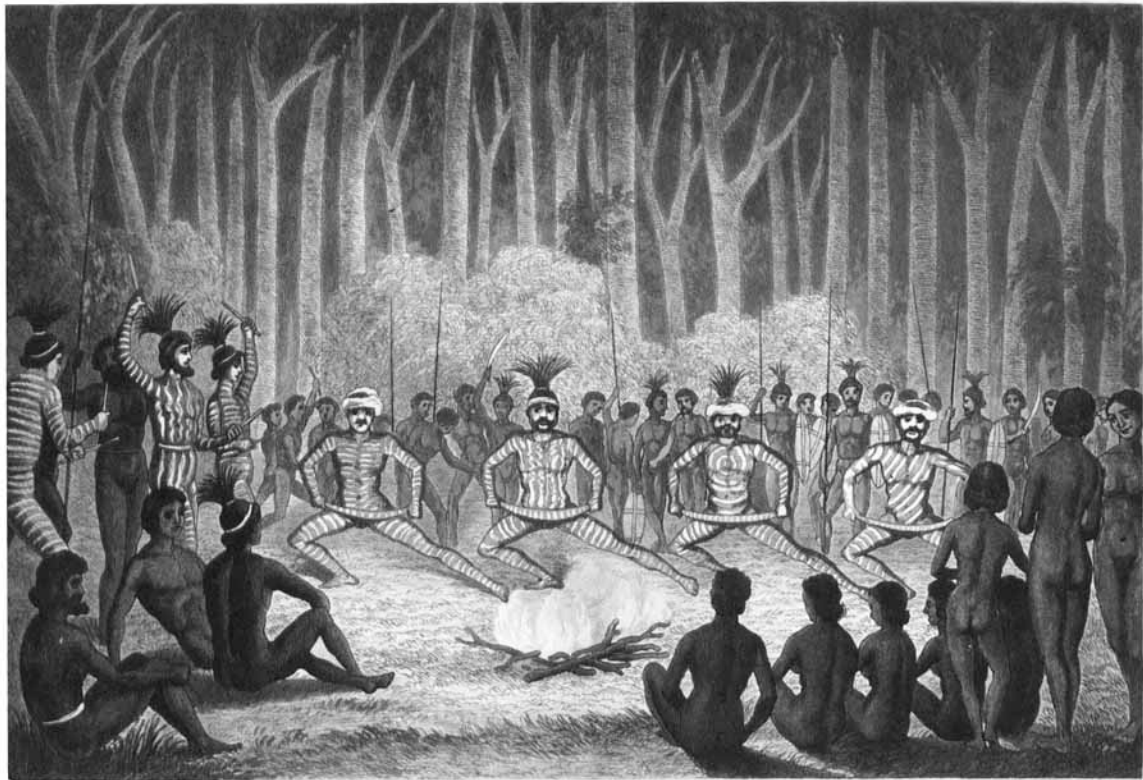
As the boys of a tribe approach the age of puberty, a grand ceremony, to inaugurate them into the privileges of manhood, takes place. This ceremony is entirely different at the MacLeay and Nambucca rivers, to what it probably is in other parts of the colony, for the natives there do not strike out the front tooth as elsewhere. When a tribe has determined on initiating their youths into these rites, they send messengers to the surrounding tribes of blacks, to invite them to be present on the occasion. These messengers or ambassadors appear to be distinguished by having their head-bands

coloured with very pale yellow ochre, instead of the usual deep red, whilst their hair is drawn up and crowned by the high top-knots of grass, resembling nodding plumes, which ornament is, I think, peculiar to the blacks north of the Hunter,—at least, I have never seen it farther south, where the hair is usually matted with gum, and decorated with dogs' tails and teeth. After all the preliminaries are settled, and the surrounding tribes arrived, the blacks repair to the Cawarra ground. This is a circular plot about thirty feet in diameter, carefully levelled, weeded, and smoothed down. It is, in general, situated on the summit of some round-topped hill, and the surrounding trees are minutely tatoed and carved to such a considerable altitude, that one cannot help feeling astonished at the labour bestowed upon this work. The women are now dismissed to the distance of two miles from the Cawarra ground; for if one of them should happen to witness, or hear any portion of the ceremony, they would be immediately put to death. The first evening is passed in dancing the ordinary corroberee; during which, the invited blacks sit round their respective fires as spectators, whilst the boys, who are to undergo the ceremony, squat down in a body by themselves, and keep up a bright fire for the dancers. From the repugnance which the blacks at the MacLeay displayed on my looking at their performance, and their angry refusal to allow me to see the main part of the ceremony, I am unable to



give a regular account of it, having only been able to obtain occasional glimpses. After many preliminary grotesque mummeries have been performed, the doctors or priests of the tribe take each a boy, and hold him for some time with his head downwards near the fire. Afterwards, with great solemnity, they are invested with the opossum belt; and at considerable intervals between each presentation, they are given the nulla-nulla, the boomerang, the spear, &c. Whilst these arms are being conferred upon them, the other natives perform a sham fight, and pretend to hunt the pademella, spear fish, and imitate various other occupations, in which the weapons, now presented to the youth, will be of service. As these ceremonies occupied a fortnight or more before they were concluded, many other ridiculous scenes were undoubtedly enacted, and during all this time, the women did not dare to approach the performers. Each man was also provided with a singular instrument, formed of a piece of hollowed wood fastened to a long piece of flax string; by whirling this rapidly round their heads, a loud shrill noise was produced, and the blacks seemed to attach a great degree of mystic importance to the sound of this instrument, for they told me, that if a woman heard it, she would die. The conclusion of this ceremony, was a grand dance of a peculiar character, in which the boys join, and which the women are allowed to see. This dance is performed with much more solemnity than the ordinary

corroberrees. The Yarra-Hapinni tribe, which I saw execute this dance near the Clybucca creek, were so elaborately painted with white for the occasion, that even their very toes and fingers were carefully and regularly coloured with concentric rings, whilst their hair was drawn up in a close knot, and stuck all over with the snowy down of the white cockatoo, which gave them the appearance of being decorated with white wings. In this dance, the performers arranged themselves in the form of a semicircle, and grasping the ends of their boomerangs, which are also painted with great minuteness and regularity, they swayed their bodies rapidly from right to left, displaying a degree of flexibility in their limbs, which might have created the envy of many a pantomimic artist. Each movement of their bodies to and fro was accompanied by a loud hiss, whilst a number of other natives similarly painted, beat time with sticks, and kept up an incessant and obstreperous song. Every now and then the dancers would stop and rush, crowding together, into a circle, raising their weapons with outstretched arms, and joining with frantic energy in the song. They would then be more composed, and walk backwards and forwards in couples, holding each other by the hand, until again roused by an elderly native to resume the dance. It was not until midnight that the noise ceased, which, every evening, whilst the ceremonies lasted, might be heard at a distance of two or three miles. The tribes of natives near



Dance at the conclusion of the Cavarra Ceremonies

Sydney, where the boys are always deprived of their front teeth, do not seem to be so averse to the whites witnessing their ceremonies, which differ considerably from what I have just described.

In their mode of going through the ceremony, the boys being assembled together, and the whole tribe mustered for the occasion, a party of men armed and painted, advanced into the Cawarra ground, with loud shouts and clattering of their arms, and seized, one by one, the boys who were to undergo the operation. The latter were then placed together on the Cawarra ground, where they were to pass the night in perfect silence; in the meantime the other natives danced and sang furiously, whilst the doctors or "corradjees" went through a most ridiculous scene, groaning and contorting themselves in every position until they at length pretended to be delivered of some bones, which were subsequently used to cut open the gums of the boys before striking out their teeth. Next day the boys were brought into the centre of the Cawarra ground, whilst the other blacks performed various ridiculous antics around them in imitation of various animals. Sticking their boomerangs vertically in their opossum-skin belts, so as to bear some resemblance to the tail of the native dog, they ran on all fours past the boys, throwing up dust, whilst the latter remained motionless, with downcast eyes. They next fastened to their girdles long pieces of twisted grass, to resemble the tail of

the kangaroo ; and then bounded round the boys in imitation of the movement of that animal, whilst others pretended to spear them.

All this time an incessant shouting, singing, and dancing, had been kept up. After this the boys were placed in a cluster together, with their heads lowered and their hands crossed over their breasts, whilst the most ridiculous antics were performed by the rest of the natives, who, mounted on each other's backs, threw themselves on the ground, whilst the boys were made to walk over their prostrate bodies, and executed a multitude of evolutions with their spears and shields. The final operation was then performed ; the gums being lanced with the bones before mentioned, a stick was applied to the tooth, and a large stone employed to strike it out. As each boy lost his front tooth, the gum was closed up, but the blood was not allowed to be washed or wiped off ; he was then furnished with the belt of manhood, boomerangs, &c. and joined in the corroberree dances which concluded the ceremony.

The fights of the natives are generally conducted on the principles of retributive justice. Their mode of warfare is fair, open, and manly ; for tribes on hostile terms scorn to take the least undue advantage of each other, and the instant a fight is concluded, both parties seem perfectly reconciled, and jointly assist in tending the wounded men. In this respect the quarrels of the Aborigines of New South Wales, present a striking contrast to the cruel and

treacherous warfare of the North American Indians, and the ferocious and implacable contests which used to take place among the *ci-devant* man-eating New Zealanders.

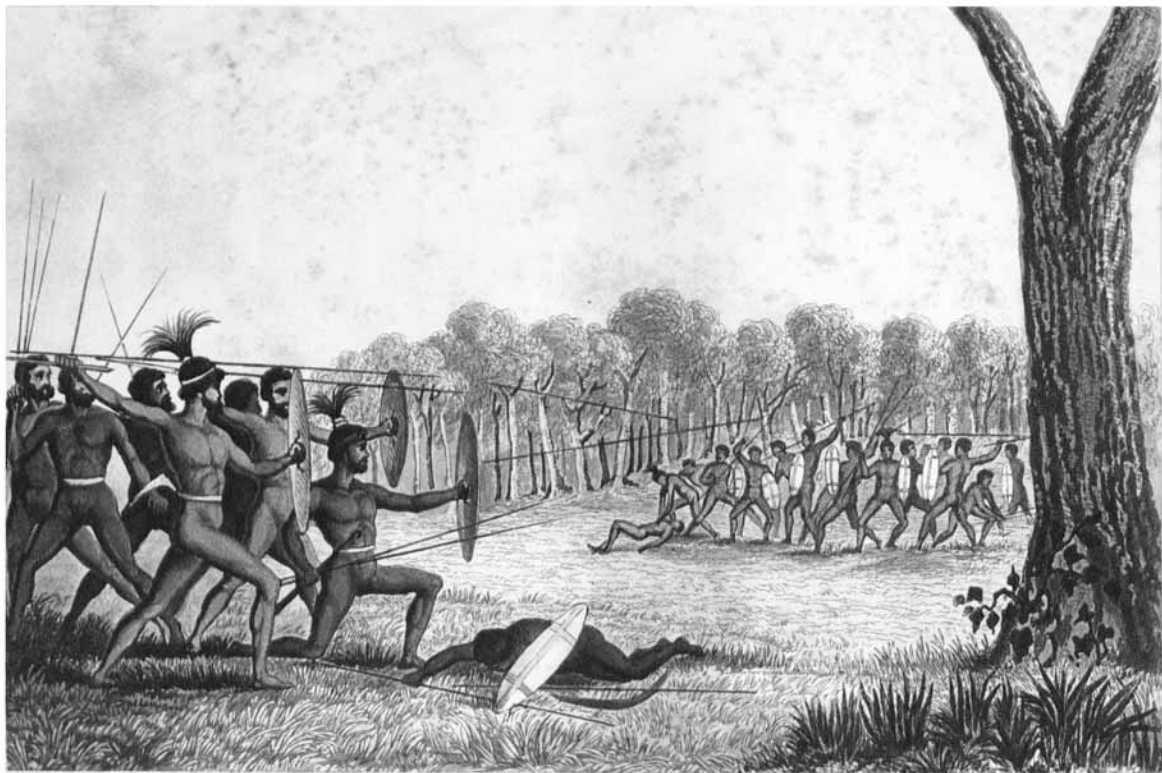
Acts of treachery sometimes occur between individual natives, but these acts, though they involve the tribe, to which the offending party belongs, in war with the other tribe, are always punished, as the offender has always to bear the brunt of the engagement, and stand for some time alone, unassisted by his companions, as a butt for the spears of the immediate relations of the man whom he has killed or wounded.

It seems to be a regular principle with the Australian Aborigines, that blood must be shed for blood; and as an example will better illustrate the warfare of the natives, than a general description, I will give a short account of a quarrel among some MacLeay river tribes, during my stay there.

Three young men, belonging to the Yarra-Bandini tribe, which was also the name of our cattle-station, (as that locality was the head-quarters of this tribe,) had descended the river in a canoe to Verge's station, which is within the limits of the boundaries of the Calliteeni or Kempsey tribe. The object they had in view, was to kill a Tryal bay native, whom the sawyers had nicknamed Cranky Tom, from his comical hilarity:—for it would appear that Cranky Tom had some time before killed one of the relations of these men in a



*Grandy Tom and Delbarce,
Natives of the Warra-hapenne Tribe.*



A Fight

fight, and they now determined to revenge his death. Poor Tom, who was my earliest acquaintance among the Tryal bay natives, was stopping with his 'gin' Dilberree near Verge's, without any suspicion of treachery, when he was suddenly confronted by his enemies. Having endeavoured in vain to protect himself with his shield, he soon fell pierced with wounds, and his head was then cut off by his savage enemies, one of whom, named Henry, also took possession of the woman. This act of treachery roused the indignation of two tribes, the Kempsey or Calliteeni blacks, on whose grounds the outrage had been committed, and the Tryal bay blacks to whom the murdered man belonged. On speaking to the chief men of the Yarra-Bandini tribe, about this cowardly attack, they merely told me in reply, that Henry and the other men were "murry stupid," to act as they did, but that Cranky Tom was a "murry saucy fellow," and deserved what he had got. The Yarra-Bandini tribe were encamped, in the mean time, close to our stock-yards.

The first of their adversaries in the field, were the Kempsey blacks, who came over one afternoon, and fought the Yarra-Bandini natives at our very doors. The battle was conducted in the most fair and open manner; each party drew up in two lines, armed with spears, shields, and boomerangs, and threw spear for spear for a considerable time, before any damage was done. At length a Yarra-Bandini black was slightly wounded in the forehead;



and soon after a Kempsey native, whom the sawyers had named "Major Lovatt," was transfixed with a spear, which apparently passed through his lungs. This concluded the fight; both the hostile parties now mingled together in the most friendly way; and the Yarra-Bandini tribe was even more anxious than the other, in their endeavours to alleviate the wounds of the dying man. My partner also rendered every assistance to him, but he expired in a few minutes. By a most extraordinary revulsion of feeling, the Kempsey blacks now became furiously enraged against the Tryal bay tribe, whose cause they had just espoused so actively.

Accordingly, under the pretence that an immense flock of ducks had settled on some lagoon down the river, the Kempsey natives, who are few in number, but more conversant with the customs of the whites than the others, succeeded in persuading some cedar dealers and sawyers at that place, to lend them some muskets, which they loaded with slugs, and they then proceeded down the river in a boat. The Tryal bay blacks, who were quite taken by surprise by this unusual manœuvre, were soon worsted, and several of them were wounded by the shot, but none killed. Matters now became more complicated, for one of the Nambucca river tribes, being indignant at the treatment of their neighbours at Tryal bay, took part in the quarrel.

A week or two afterwards, being at Yarra-Bandini, a gin, who had been sent from our station on some



message, returned in a great hurry, glistening with moisture from having swam across the creek ; as she had seen the Tryal bay tribe, who were coming up to fight the natives at our place. She had scarcely bounded away from us to warn them of the approach of their enemies, when the latter appeared, marching in Indian file, having their bodies painted with red stripes, and their bark shields whitened with pipe clay and adorned with double red crosses. They advanced with a measured tramp, carrying their spears aloft at a uniform slope, with their shields on the left side. They had just arrived where we were standing, when the Yarra-Bandini blacks, having been warned by the gin of the approach of their enemies, dashed out of the adjoining brush, and throwing themselves into regular rows, five or six deep, commenced a furious dance in defiance of the other party, leaping up and down at a measured tread, whilst they beat time with their nulla-nullas and waddies, accompanying each jump with a short loud shout. As soon as their adversaries had arrived opposite to them, each party halted, whilst the chief men on both sides advanced, and commenced a most animated dialogue, occasionally threatening each other with their spears. A very old woman, whom the Tryal bay blacks had brought up with them, seemed to be particularly active in abusing and insulting the Yarra-Bandini natives, whom she railed at unceasingly in a loud screaming voice. As the Australian aborigines look upon their women as very

inferior animals to themselves, I suppose the Tryal bay tribe had brought up this scolding old lady, in order to evince the greater contempt for the other tribe; much upon the same principle, which once induced a king of France to send a defiance to an English prince by a scullion, instead of a herald, in order to insult him the more grievously.

After a long altercation the two hostile tribes mingled together, as though they were on the best terms with each other; they encamped, however, for the night, at some distance apart. Next morning the fight commenced, in which, according to the usual custom, the three natives who had been the original cause of the quarrel, stood prominently forward, exposed to the spears of the Tryal bay blacks for some time, without receiving any assistance from their companions, until one of them received a spear wound on the instep, and another on the knee. The fight then became general, but no further damage was done, as each party was equally adroit in warding off, with their shields, the missiles that were flying about. This engagement seemed to conclude the quarrel between the Yarra-Bandini and Yarra-Hapinni blacks, as the gin Dilberree, who had been carried off, was restored to her friends. It was, however, some time before the other quarrels, which had arisen from this affair, were fought out; after which a general peace had to be consolidated by solemn corroborees, danced successively on the grounds of each of the belligerent tribes.

Although the Aborigines are in general so honourable and open in their warfare with one another, their behaviour towards the whites is very different, being often treacherous in the extreme. It frequently happens that those persons who have been most liberal and kind to the natives, are chosen as their first victims; for if a white man gives a present to a native, without stipulating for some service in return, the latter imputes the generosity of the white man to fear. Thus, the sawyers at the Nambucca, who gave the blacks a large quantity of flour, tobacco, sugar, &c. in order to propitiate them, became immediately exposed to their murderous attacks, which did not cease until the natives had received a severe lesson or two, to convince them of the superiority of the arms of the white men.

The districts near Port Phillip, where the blacks have committed the most serious outrages, are the very ones in which the salaried Protectors of Aborigines have resided. I do not know in what the duties of the Protectors consist; but no good has been derived from their appointment, as the natives in that part of Australia have been more audacious in their attacks on distant sheep-stations, than in any other districts; and on being pursued after their ravages, they have been known to jeeringly dare the whites to fire at them, as the Governor would hang any one who shoots at "blackfellows!"

"The soothing system" is no better adapted to civilize the natives of Australia, than to reclaim the

convicts at Norfolk Island ; and indeed I think that all endeavours to make them adopt more settled habits will be useless, for what great inducement does the monotonous and toilsome existence of the labouring classes in civilized communities offer, to make the savage abandon his independent and careless life, diversified by the exciting occupations of hunting, fishing, fighting, and dancing.

It is not certainly from want of intelligence that the Australian Aborigines have hitherto proved so unreclaimable. The mental faculties of the Australian savage have been too much underrated, except by those authors who have had the best opportunity of witnessing their manners and customs in their purely wild state, such as Oxley, Sturt, and Mitchell, especially the latter, whose occasional remarks on the Aborigines, are full of graphic truth. I will conclude by two or three examples of the intelligence of the natives which have come under my own observation. During the time that my tents were pitched near the Nambucca, some years ago, a native arrived at my camp, unable to hold any communication with my men in the ordinary jargon, forming the medium of communication between the blacks and the whites. As I made it a rule never to allow the natives to loiter about my tents, unless they performed some slight service for me, for which I repaid them with flour or tobacco, I told my tent-keeper to give this man something to do. Accordingly, he brought out some muskets, which required

cleaning, and having unscrewed the lock of one of them, he shewed the black how to clean it with a bit of rag. This native had, no doubt, heard of guns, but had never before had one in his hands; yet, he not only cleaned the locks of the muskets, but even took a percussion gun, which my servant had brought out with the intention of cleaning it himself, and without a word being said to him on the subject, took the lock entirely to pieces, although its construction was so different to that of a flint lock, and having carefully cleaned and oiled it, he put it together again, which I am sure not one Englishman out of ten would have been able to do, if previously unacquainted with the mechanism of gun locks.

A boy, belonging to a tribe at the Manning river, who had been induced to accompany a friend of mine as far as the MacLeay, drew, with a piece of chalk, human heads and figures, kangaroos, &c. with a firm well defined outline, which few English boys of his age could have done better, unless they had had lessons in drawing.

Some natives I have seen exhibit a dexterity in carpentry, and in the use of various tools, which a white man could not acquire until he had practised with them for some time; and indeed in every thing requiring the exercise of mechanical ingenuity or dexterity, the Australian Aborigines are most apt scholars.