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HENRY DOWLING, STATIONER, LAUNCESTON.

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1849.

ART. XIII. On the "Bunyip" of Australia Felix. By Mr.
RONALD C. GUNN.*

(With Three Plates.)

FROM time to time for many years various indistinct reports have been received from the aborigines of Port Phillip, of the existence of a large amphibious animal, inhabiting the rivers of that colony, and called by different tribes by the names *Bunyip* or *Bunyup*, *Katenpai*, *Kayan-prati*, *Tumutba*, *Tunatpan*, &c., but no traces of it have been seen by any of the white inhabitants. The statement of the aborigines relative to the Bunyip is, that it is of the size of a bullock, with a head and neck like an emu's, and a mane and tail like a horse's. In their rude drawings of it they give it two tusks, or front teeth, curved downwards; and feet like those of a seal; they say that it is oviparous and burrows, commencing its burrow under water, and working upwards until it is above the water level, where in a chamber, accessible only through the water, it deposits its eggs, which are as large as a bucket, enclosed in a membranous skin like a turtle's, and not in a hard shell. They say that it eats black-fellows, and all are afraid of those deep holes in the rivers which it inhabits,—but its usual food is crayfish or lobsters (very abundant in the large rivers in that colony) and roots. Many other particulars are furnished by the blacks, but they do not all agree either in their drawings or details, so that much uncertainty prevails as to the existence of this wonderful animal, although many attach a considerable degree of credit to the assertions of the aborigines. During last month (January), however, Athol Fletcher, Esq., found a *skull* on the banks of the river Murrumbidgee, which all the natives to whom it was shown called a Bunyip's, and as it was unlike that of any animal with which he was acquainted he brought it with him to Melbourne. No other bones of any description were found with it. There it has excited much interest; and as it will probably be forwarded to London by an early vessel, I was very much gratified to have the opportunity afforded me of examining

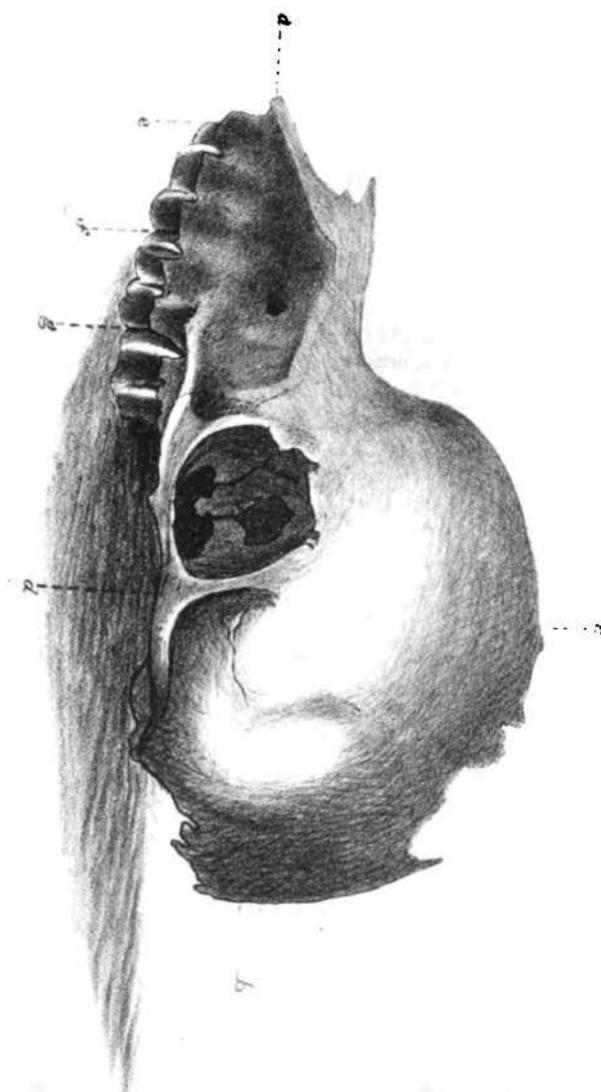
* An unavoidable delay which has taken place in publishing the present number of the *Tasmanian Journal* has enabled us to introduce this article with its illustrations.—Ed.

it through the kindness of my friend Edward Curr, Esq., of St. Heliers, near Melbourne, who obtained the loan of it from Mr. Fletcher, and forwarded it to Launceston for my inspection. From the letters of His Excellency C. J. Latrobe, Esq., and more especially from those of Mr. Curr, I have drawn the preceding particulars.

I at once submitted the skull to my friend Dr. James Grant, whose report I subjoin, illustrated by three very accurate drawings:—

19th February, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,—It is to be regretted that we have no museum in these colonies to which we might refer in cases like this of the so called Bunyip, where an apparently new form presents itself. The skull is that of a very young animal, probably even fœtal; and although the general form of the head and the arrangement of the teeth are different from those of any animal with which I am acquainted, I am not aware how much of this apparent peculiarity may not be owing to the mere circumstance of imperfect development. It has been suggested that it might prove to be that of a young camel, a few of which animals were introduced to Australia about seven years since. I send you three drawings, (plates III., IV., and V.,) which exhibit different views of the skull. It is that of a large *herbivorous* animal; the bones are very smooth, thin, and some of them imperfectly ossified; the two sides of the head are not symmetrical, and the teeth were covered with a membrane, which I scraped off in order to make the drawings. From its general appearance the skull could not have been exposed many months. There is a very unusual disproportion between the relative sizes of the face and of the cranium—the former being very small, while the latter is very much developed; the brain must have been of enormous magnitude. The smallness of the muzzle seems to be partly owing to the circumstance that the three molar teeth (plates III. IV., e. f. g.) are placed very far forward in the mouth. Immediately anterior to these are two small sockets (h) apparently for small premolars; but as the front part of the palate plate has been broken off I cannot say whether there were any incisor teeth, especially as it is impossible to trace



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PLATE V.

