*THE NATIVE TRIBES OF CENTRAL AUSTRALIA.*¹

THE sincere efforts of some of the Australian governments to protect the native tribes have met with eminently satisfactory ethnographical results. It is only a few months ago that a highly meritorious work on the Queensland natives by Walter E. Roth was published by the Queensland Government, and we have now before us a very thorough work dealing with the native tribes of Central Australia—the joint production of a professor of biology and a protector of aborigines. These gentlemen have spent many years in the study of their black friends, and have become initiated into those mysteries into which Grey, Gason, Fison and Howitt were the first to make headway. The book thus contains a considerable amount of information quite new to us, as well as other matter largely confirmatory of the investigations of their predecessors, rendered all the more valuable by the conscientious pains that have been taken to thoroughly investigate everything in connection with native customs with which they have had to deal. In referring to the common statement that the Australian native is incapable of gratitude, the authors explain the position taken up by the aboriginal as regards this virtue, and point out that, although he is exceedingly liberal himself, he does not think it necessary to express his gratitude when he receives a gift from one of his own tribe, and that we should, in order to understand the sentiments of the native, put ourselves into his mental attitude, and then the question is capable of being more or less explained or understood. It is no doubt by their adoption of this attitude that they have been peculiarly successful in their studies. With the advent of the white man the secret ceremonies fall into disuse, for the young men get attracted away to the stations, and naturally feel less disposed to obey their elders; and these, in turn, consider the growing youth unworthy of initiation; hence the ceremonies get neglected and die out. It is of consequence therefore that every scrap of information regarding them be properly recorded, and in doing this Messrs. Spencer and Gillen have collected a mass of detail which, while it may at first sight appear somewhat superfluous, will be invaluable for future reference as further investigations are carried on.

Valuable portions of the book consist in the comparisons made between the results of studies on the Australian tribes under review, and those of studies made by anthropological students elsewhere, and it is significant of the importance of field work that the theories of McLennan and Westermarck on group marriage are not borne out by the present investigations. For instance, marriage by capture, notwithstanding what has been written on the subject, is an exception rather than the rule with the Australians, so that a good deal that Westermarck bases on this custom falls to the ground. In group marriage the authors distinguish (p. 108) three grades of development, and from their studies of these conclude that the customs indicate a temporary recognition of certain general rights which existed in times previous to that of the clearly defined system of group marriage. The authors are careful to add that the indications do not afford any direct evidence

of the former existence of actual promiscuity, but only that evidence is afforded in such direction. The tendency of the evidence of prehistoric promiscuity is, however, so strong that we cannot doubt its former existence; and if the authors had elucidated no other point than this, they would have done good work. The totemism of the tribes shows some curious departures from the customs commonly associated with the idea of totemism as met with amongst other Australian tribes, as well as with primitive people elsewhere. Each individual considers himself the direct reincarnation of an ancestor, whose spirit having become humanised, has entered a woman, and so the individual is born in human form; the totemic animal or plant is not regarded exactly as a

FIG. 1.—Irruntarinia ceremony of the Unjiamba Totem to illustrate one form of Nurtunja; the small cross pieces represent pointing sticks.

close relative, and an individual may help to kill or destroy his totem; members of the same totem are not bound to assist one another, nor does totemism rule in marriage, so that two individuals of the same totem may be lawfully man and wife. The authors are unable to explain satisfactorily these anomalies, nevertheless their inquiries on the subject of totemism are quite amongst the most fascinating of the book. The Arunta tribe, the description of whose customs occupy the greater portion of the monograph, reckon descent through the male instead of, as do most of the surrounding tribes, through the female; but, as is pointed out (p. 36), it is doubtful whether in all cases the counting of descent in the female

¹ "The Native Tribes of Central Australia." By Prof. B. Spencer and F. G. Gillen. Pp. xx + 671. (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1899.)

line has preceded the counting of it in the male line, and we are also shown good reason for excepting the statement that descent in the female line is necessarily a sign

may have a connection with the traditional wanderings of their Achilpa ancestors, concerning which we are provided with detailed accounts and maps of the routes followed. The fact, that the ancestors came from the south-west and south-east, and found themselves among already located peoples, looks as if the northern immigration having crossed Australia and reached the extreme confines of the continent had rolled back on its tracks. Every group of natives appears to have its local head man; this position he attains on account of his skill in hunting or fighting, or his knowledge of the ancient traditions of the tribe; such a man will consult the elders of his tribe, but the final disposition of all points rests in his hands: no stranger will enter the camp without his permission; should he have no son to succeed him he appears to have the power to nominate the individual he desires to be his successor—in other words he is in a primitive fashion chief of his group. On the other hand, the natives do not appear to have arrived at that state where a chief of a tribe becomes a necessity. We are glad to see the authors take a stand against the common assertion that the Australian aboriginal is degenerate; no assertion can be wider the mark, for we have no evidence to show that the Australian was ever in a higher state of civilisation than that in which he is now found.

The book, suitably dedicated to the founders of Australian anthropology, is a solid piece of work of altogether exceptional merit. In the above remarks we have only been able to point out a few of its more salient features; but there is a mass of information we have not touched upon, and which will gladden the heart of the anthropological student. The excellent illustrations of the ceremonies, evidently obtained with much care, patience and difficulty, are of considerable assistance to the text; the glossary fulfils its purpose, and the index is good.

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FIG. 2.—Ceremony of the Emu Totem; the head-dress represents the neck and head of an emu.

FIG. 3.—Kurdaitcha creeping up to his enemy. Between his teeth he holds a small stone Churinga; the shoes are seen on his feet, and in his left hand he holds a shield and two or three wooden Churinga.

of primitiveness. Perhaps the divergences in the customs recorded of some of these Central Australian tribes

since ranked among the standard works of reference for engineers.