

## ETHNOLOGICAL NOTES, No. 5.

By the late

W. W. THORPE,

(Ethnologist, Australian Museum)

and

FREDERICK D. MCCARTHY,

(Assistant Ethnologist, Australian Museum).

(Plates vii-ix.)

This paper was commenced by the late W. W. Thorpe shortly before his untimely death. It contains a description of two unusual types of ground stone implements of the Australian aborigines, in the collection of the Australian Museum, and also in the possession of members of the Anthropological Society of New South Wales, to whom thanks are due for the loan of the specimens. The petrological determinations by Mr. T. Hodge-Smith, Mineralogist, Australian Museum, are based on megascopic characters only.

### Ground-edge Knives.

(Pls. vii-viii.)

The series figured is extremely interesting, as these are the smallest ground-edge stone implements made by the aborigines. In the collection they are termed "skinning knives," "flaying knives," and "skin dressers." There is unfortunately scant information available in regard to the type of implement used by the aborigines for skinning and dressing. Where such are recorded for cutting flesh, they are almost invariably described as "sharp flints" or "chips of stone."

In some parts of Queensland the human corpse was skinned with a stone knife<sup>1</sup>; McDonald describes the flaying of a corpse on the Mary River.<sup>2</sup> For this process a metal knife was used, but obviously this had replaced a stone implement.<sup>3</sup> This operation takes place in other parts of Australia also.

Brough Smyth figures a "Chip dug out of a mirrn-yong heap . . . it has a tolerably sharp cutting edge, and appears to be a fragment of chert. It had not been ground or polished, and the fracture is semi-conchoidal. I was quite sure that it was an ancient chip that had been used in cutting open and skinning animals taken in the chase."<sup>4</sup> Dawson says of the Victorians:—"For skinning animals, marking rugs, and cutting the human skin to produce ornamental wens on the chest, back and arms, knives are made of splinters of flint, or of sharpened mussel shells. . . . For skinning the ring-tailed opossum and for dividing meat, the leaf of the grass-tree is used, and also the long front tooth of the bandicoot, with the jaw attached as a handle."<sup>5</sup> Amongst the Narrinyeri in

<sup>1</sup> Barron Field.—*Geogr. Mem.* 1825, pp. 71-76; Roth, North Queensland Ethnogr., Bull. 9, in *Rec. Austr. Mus.*, VI, 5, 1907, pp. 398-403.

<sup>2</sup> McDonald.—*Journ. Anthr. Inst.*, I, 1872, pp. 214-19.

<sup>3</sup> Curr.—*The Australian Race*, Melbourne, 1887, III, pp. 136-47, and p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> Brough Smyth.—*Aborigines of Victoria*, I, 1878, pp. 361-2, 381-2, figs. 210 and 217.

<sup>5</sup> Dawson.—*Australian Aborigines*, 1881, p. 25.