

TOM PETRIE'S
REMINISCENCES
of
EARLY QUEENSLAND

(Dating from 1837)

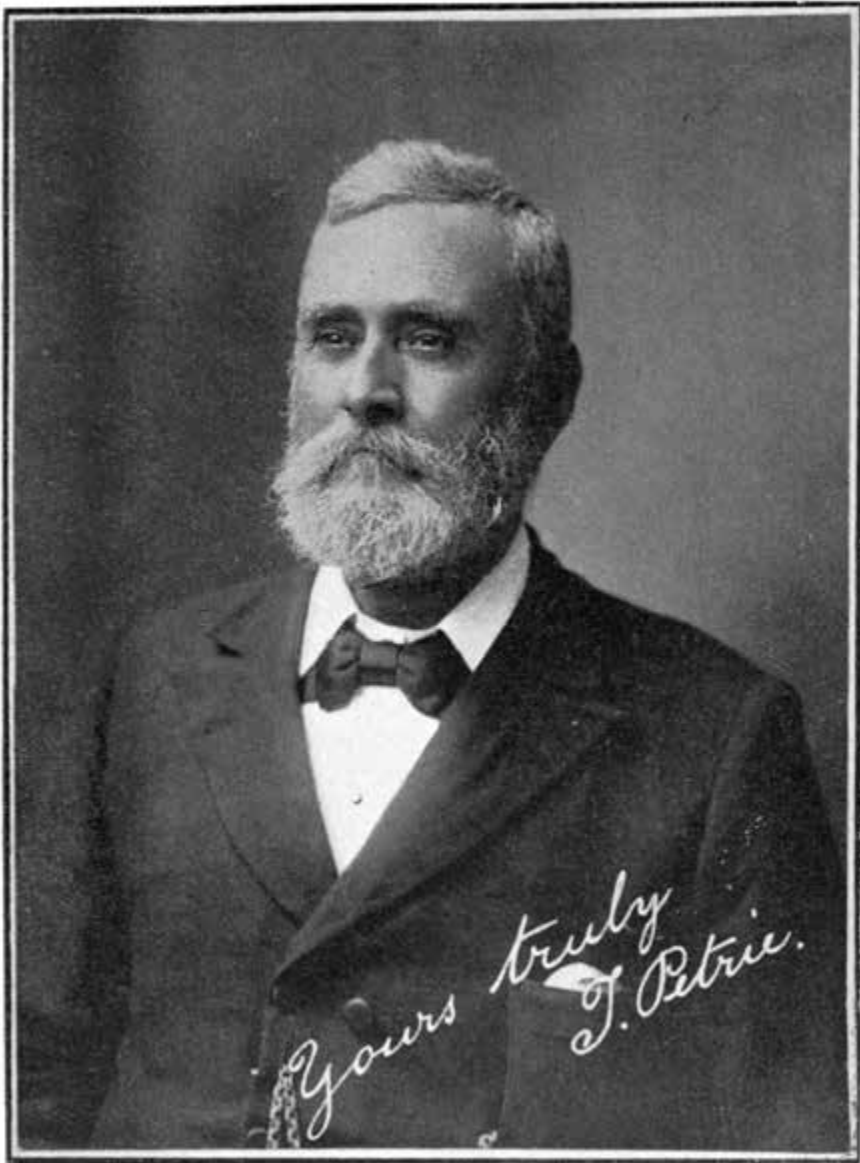
Recorded by his daughter



BRISBANE :
WATSON, FERGUSON & CO.

1904

[copyright]



Tom Petrie.

Photo by P. C. Poulsen.

To
My father,
Tom Petrie,
whose faithful memory
has supplied
the material for
this book.

Copyright © 2014

This book is copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the Publishers.

All rights reserved.

First published 1904

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Author: Petrie, Constance Campbell, author (1873 - 4 July 1926)

Title: Tom Petrie's reminiscences of early Queensland / recorded by his daughter
Constance Campbell Petrie.

ISBN: 9781922109972 (paperback)

Subjects: Petrie, Tom, 1831-1910.

Aboriginal Australians-Queensland-Social life and customs.

Frontier and pioneer life-Queensland.

Queensland-History-1824-1900.

Queensland-Social life and customs-1824-1900.

Dewey Number: 994.302092

Typeset in Goudy 11 pt

Published by Watson Ferguson & Company.

Printed and bound by Watson Ferguson & Company, Salisbury, Brisbane, Australia.

NOTE

The greater portion of the contents of this book first appeared in the *Queenslander* in the form of articles, and when those referring to the Aborigines were published, Dr. Roth, author of *Ethnological Studies*, etc., wrote the following letter to that paper:

TOM PETRIE'S REMINISCENCES

(By C.C.P.)

TO THE EDITOR.

Sir, — It is with extreme interest that I have perused the remarkable series of articles appearing in the *Queenslander* under the above heading, and sincerely trust that they will be subsequently reprinted... The Aborigines of Australia are fast dying out, and with them one of the most interesting phases in the history and development of man. Articles such as these, referring to the old Brisbane blacks, of whom I believe but one old warrior still remains, are well worth permanently recording in convenient book form — they are, all of them, clear, straight-forward statements of facts — many of which by analogy, and from early records, I have been able to confirm and verify — they show an intimate and profound knowledge of the Aborigines with whom they deal, and if only to show with what diligence they have been written, the native names are correctly, i.e., rationally spelt. Indeed, I know of no other author whose writings on the alltochthonous Brisbaneites can compare with those under the initials of C.C.P. If these reminiscences are to be reprinted, I will be glad of your kindly bearing me in mind as a subscriber to the volume.

Cooktown, 23rd August.

I am, Sir, etc.,
WALTER E. ROTH

P R E F A C E

My father's name is so well known in Queensland that no explanation of the title of this book is necessary. Its contents are simply what they profess to be — *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences* ; no history of Queensland being attempted, though a sketch of life in the early convict days is included in its pages. My father's association with the Queensland Aborigines from early boyhood, was so intimate, and extended over so many years, that his experience of their manners, their habits, their customs, their traditions, myths, and folklore, have an undoubted ethnological value. Rehearsing this, I determined as far as lay in my power to save from oblivion by presenting in book form, the vast body of information garnered in the perishable storehouse of one man's — my father's — memory.

To my friend, Dr. Roth, Chief Protector of Aborigines, Queensland, I am indebted for the proper spelling of Aboriginal words, and I wish to thank him for all his kindly interest and help. The spelling thus referred to is that adopted by the Royal Geographical Society of London, and followed in other continental countries. In this connection I may mention that the Brisbane or Turrbal tribe is identical with the Turrubul tribe of Rev. W. Ridley. It was my father who gave this gentleman the original information concerning these particular blacks.

Scientific names of trees and plants have been obtained through the courtesy of Mr. F. M. Bailey, F.L.S., Government Botanist, Brisbane.

CONSTANCE CAMPBELL PETRIE

“Murrumba”, North Pine,
October, 1904.

Contents

CHAPTER I

Tom Petrie – Andrew Petrie – Moreton Bay in the Thirties – Petrie’s Bight – First Steamer in the River – “Tom’s” Childhood – “Kabon-Tom” – Brisbane or Turrbal Tribe – North Pine Forty-five years ago – Alone with the Blacks – Their Trustworthiness and Consideration – Arsenic in Flour – Black Police – Shooting the Blacks – Inhuman Cruelty – St. Helena Murder – Bribie Island Murder. 1

CHAPTER II

Bonyi Season on the Blackall Range – Gatherings like Picnics – Born Mimics – “Cry for the Dead” – Treated like a Prince – Caboolture (Kabultur) – Superstitions of the Blacks – Climbing the Bonyi – Gathering the Nuts – Number at these Feasts – Their Food while there – Willingness to Share. 9

CHAPTER III

Sacrifice – Cannibalism – Small Number killed in Fights – Corroborees – “Full Dress” – Women’s Ornaments – Painted Bodies – Burying the Nuts – Change of Food – Teaching Corroborees – Making new ones – How Brown’s Creek got its Name – Kulkarawa – “Mi-na” (Mee-na). 17

CHAPTER IV

“Turrwan” or Great Man – “Kundri” – Spirit of Rainbow – A Turrwan’s Great Power – Sickness and Death – Burial Customs – Spirit of the Dead – Murderer’s Footprint – Bones of Dead – Discovering the Murderer – Revenge – Preparations for a Cannibal Feast – Flesh Divided Out – A Sacred Tree – Presented with a Piece of Skin – Cripples and Deformed People. 27

CHAPTER V

How Names were given – “Kippa” making – Two Ceremonies – Charcoal and Grease Rubbed on Body – Feathers and Paint – Exchanging News – Huts for the Boys – Instructions given them – “Bugaram” – “Wobbalkan” – Trial of the Boys – Red Noses – “Kippa’s Dress”. 35

CHAPTER VI

Great Fight – Camping-ground – Yam-sticks – Boys’ Weapons – Single-handed Fight – Great Gashes – Charcoal Powder for Healing – Same Treatment Kill a White man – Nose Pierced – Body Marked – “Kippa-ring” – “Kakka” – Notched Stick – Images Along the Roadway. 41

CHAPTER VII

Fireworks Display – Warning the Women – Secret Corroboree – “Look at this Wonder” – Destroying the “Kakka” – How Noses were Pierced – Site of Kipparings” – Raised Scars – Intertribal Exchange of Weapons, etc. – Removing Left Little Finger – Fishing or Coast Women. 49

CHAPTER VIII

Mourning for the Dead – Red, White, and Yellow Colouring – No Marriage Ceremony – Strict Marriage Laws – Exchange of Brides – Mother-in-Law – Three or Four Wives – Blackfellows’ Dogs – Bat Made the Men and Night-Hawk the Women – Thrush which Warned the Blacks – Dreams – Moon and Sun – Lightning – Cures for Illness – Pock Marks – Dugong Oil. 55

CHAPTER IX

Food – How It was Obtained – Catching and Cooking Dugong – An Incident at Amity Point – Porpoises Never Killed ; but Regarded as Friends – They Helped to Catch Fish – Sea Mullet and Other Fish – Fishing Methods – Eels – Crabs – Oysters and Mussels – Cobra. 63

CHAPTER X

Grubs as Food – Dr. Leichhardt and Thomas Archer Tasting Them – Ants – Native Bees – Seeking for Honey – Climbing with a Vine – A Disgusting Practice – Sweet Concoction – Catching and Eating Snakes – Iguanas and Lizards – Another Superstition – Hedgehogs – Tortoises – Turtles. 71

CHAPTER XI

Kangaroos– How Caught and Eaten – Their Skins – The Aboriginal’s Wonderful Tracking Powers – Wallaby, Kangaroo Rat, Paddymelon, and Bandicoot – ‘Possum – ‘Possum Rugs – Native Bear – Squirrel – Hunting on Bowen Terrace – Glass House Mountain – Native Cat and Dog – Flying Fox. 77

CHAPTER XII

Emus – Scrub Turkeys – Swans – Ducks – Cockatoos and Parrots – Quail – Root and Other Plant Food – How it was Prepared – Meals – Water-Fire – How obtained – Signs and Signals. 83

CHAPTER XIII

Canoe-making – Rafts of Dead Sticks – How Huts were Made – Weapon Making – Boomerangs – Spears– Waddies – Yam Sticks – Shields – Stone Implements – Vessels – Dilly-Bags – String. 89

CHAPTER XIV

Games – “Murun Murun” – “Purri Purru” – “Murri Murri” – “Birbun Birbun” – Skipping – “Cat’s Cradle” – “Marutchi” – Turtle Hunting as a Game – Swimming and Diving – Mimics – “Tambil Tambil”. 99

CHAPTER XV

Aboriginal Characteristics – Hearing – Smelling – Seeing – Eating Powers – Noisy Creatures – Cowards – Property – Sex and Clan “Totems” – “The Last of His Tribe”. 105

CHAPTER XVI

Folklore – The Cockatoo’s Nest – A Strange Fish – A Love Story – The Old-woman Ghost – The Clever Mother Spider – A Brave Little Brother – The Snake’s Journey – The Marutchi and Bugawan – The Bittern’s Idea of a Joke – A Faithful Bride – The Dog and the Kangaroo – The Cause of the Bar in South Passage. 111

CHAPTER XVII

Duramboi – His Return to Brisbane – Amusing the Squatters – His Subsequent Great Objection to Interviews – Mr. Oscar Fristrom’s Painting – Duramboi Making Money – Marks on His Body – Rev. W. Ridley – A Trip to Enoggera for Information – Explorer Leichhardt – An Incident at York’s-Hollow – An Inquiry Held. 125

CHAPTER XVIII

A Message to Wivenhoe Station after Mr. Uhr’s Murder – Another Message to Whiteside Station – Alone in the Bush – A Coffin Ready Waiting – The Murder at Whiteside Station – Piloting “Diamonds” Through the Bush – A Reason for the Murder – An Adventure Down the Bay – No Water ; and Nothing to Eat but Oysters – A Drink out of an Old Boot – The Power of Tobacco – “A Mad Trip” 133

CHAPTER XIX

A Search for Gold – An Adventure with the Blacks – “Bumble Dick” and the Ducks – The Petrie’s Garden – Old Ned the Gardener – “Tom’s” Attempt to Shoot Birds – Aboriginal Fights in the Vicinity of Brisbane – The White Boy a Witness – “Kippa” making at Samford – Women Fighting Over a Young Man – “It Takes a Lot to Kill a Blackfellow” – A Big Fight at York’s Hollow – A Body Eaten. 141

CHAPTER XX

Early Aboriginal Murderers – “Millbong Jemmy” and His Misdeeds – Flogged by Gilligan the Flogger – David Petty – Jemmy’s Capture and Death – “Dead Man’s Pocket” – An Old Prisoner’s Story – Found in a Wretched State – Weather-bound with the Murderers on Bribie Island – Their Explanation – “Dundalli” the Murderer – Hanged in the Present Queen Street – A Horrible Sight – Dundalli’s Brother’s Death. 151

CHAPTER XXI

The Black Man's Deterioration – Worthy Characters – "Dalaipi" – Recommending North Pine as a Place to Settle – The Birth of "Murrumba" – A Portion of Whiteside Station – Mrs. Griffen – The First White Man's Humpy at North Pine – Dalaipi's Good Qualities – A Chat with Him – His Death – With Mr. Pettigrew in Early Maryboro – A Very Old Land-mark at North Pine – Proof of the Durability of Bloodwood Timber – The Word "Humpybong". 161

CHAPTER XXII

A Trip in 1862 to Mooloolah and Maroochy – Tom Petrie the First White Man on Buderim Mountain – Also on Petrie's Creek – A Specially Faithful Black – Tom Petrie and his "Big Arm" – Twenty-five Blacks Branded – King Sandy one of them – The Blacks Dislike to the Darkness – Crossing Maroochy Bar Under Difficulties – Wanangga "Willing" his Skin Away – Doomed – A Blackfellow's Grave Near "Murrumba." 173

CHAPTER XXIII

"Puram", the Rainmaker – "Governor Banjo" – His Good Nature – A Ride for Gold with Banjo – Acting a Monkey – Dressed Up and Sent a Message – Banjo and the Hose – "Missus Cranky" – Banjo's Family – His Kindness to Them – An Escape from Poisoning – Banjo's Brass Plate. 183

CHAPTER XXIV

Prince Alfred's Visit to Brisbane in 1868 – A Novel Welcome to the Duke – A Black Regiment – The Man in Plain Clothes – The Darkies' Fun and Enjoyment – Roads Tom Petrie has Marked – First Picnic Party to Humpybong – Chimney round which a Premier Played – Value of Tom Petrie's "Marked Tree Lines" – First Reserve for Aborigines in Queensland (Bribie Island) – The Interest It Caused – Father McNab – Keen Sense of Humour – Abraham's Death at Bribie – Piper, the Murderer – Death by Poison. 191

PART II

CHAPTER I

Death in 1872 of Mr. Andrew Petrie – A Sketch of His Life taken from the Brisbane Courier – Born in 1798 – His Duties in Brisbane – Sir Evan Mackenzie – Mr. David Archer – Colonel Barney – An Early Trip to Limestone (Ipswich) – Two Instances of Aborigines Recovering from Ghastly Wounds. 199

CHAPTER II

"Tinker", the Black and White Poley Bullock – Inspecting the Women's Quarters at Eagle Farm – A Picnic Occasion – Cutting in Hamilton Road, made originally by Women Convicts – Dr. Simpson – His After-dinner Smoke – His Former Life – The "Lumberyard" – The Prisoners' Meals – The Chain-gang – Logan's Reign – The "Crow-minders" – "Andy". 205

CHAPTER III

“Andy’s” Cooking – Andrew Petrie’s Walking Stick as a Warning – Tobacco-making on the Quiet – One Pipe Among a Dozen – The Floggings – “Old Bumble” – Gilligan, the Flogger, Flogged Himself – His Revenge – “Bribie”, the Basket-maker – Catching Fish in Creek Street – Old Barn the Prisoners Worked In – “Hand carts”. 211

CHAPTER IV

The Windmill (present Observatory) – Overdue Vessel – Sugar or “Coal Tar” – On the Treadmill – Chain Gang Working Out their Punishment – Leg Irons Put On – Watching the Performance – Prisoner’s Peculiar Way of Walking – “Peg-leg” Kelly – Fifteen or Sixteen Years for Stealing Turnips – Life for Stealing a Sheep – Tom Petrie’s Lessons – The Convict’s “Feather Beds” – First Execution by Hanging – Sowing Prepared Rice. 217

CHAPTER V

Mount Petrie – “Bushed” – The Black Tracker – Relic of the Early Days – Andrew Petrie’s Tree – Early Opinion of the Timbers of Moreton Bay – An Excursion to Maroochy – First Specimens of Bunya Pine – First on Beerwah Mountain – “Recollections of a Rambling Life” – Mr. Archer’s Disappointment – Another Excursion – A Block of Bunya Timber – *Pinus Pebriana* – Less Title to Fame – Discoveries of Coal, etc. 223

CHAPTER VI

Journal of an Expedition to the “Wide Bay River” in 1842 – Discovery of the Mary – Extract from Mr. Andrew Petrie’s Diary – Encountering the Aborigines – Bracefield – Same Appearance as the Wild Blacks – Davis – “Never Forget His Appearance” – Could Not Speak His “Mither’s Tongue” – Blackfellow with a Watch – Mr. McKenzie’s Murdered Shepherds – Frazer Island – Mr. Russell Sea-sick. 233

CHAPTER VII

The Alteration of Historical Names – Little Short of Criminal – Wreck of the *Stirling Castle* – Band of Explorers – Sir George Gipps – Trip Undertaken in a “Nondescript Boat” – Mr. Russell’s Details of the Trip – A Novel Cure for Sunstroke – Gammon Island – Jolliffe’s Beard. 241

CHAPTER VIII

The Early-time Squatters – Saved by the Natives from Drowning – Mr. Henry Stuart Russell – “Tom” Punished for Smoking – “Ticket-of-Leave” Men – First Racecourse in Brisbane – Harka way – Other Early Racecourses – Pranks the Squatters Played – Destiny of South Brisbane Changed – First Vessel Built in Moreton Bay – The Parson’s Attempt to Drive Bullocks – A Billy-goat Ringing a Church Bell – The First Election – Changing Sign-boards – Sir Arthur Hodgson – Sir Joshua Peter Bell. 247

CHAPTER IX

“Old Cocky” – His Little Ways – The Sydney Wentworths’ “Sulphur Crest” – “Boat Ahoy !” – “Cocky” and the Ferryman – “It’s Devilish Cold” – “What the Devil Are You Doing There ?” – Disturbing the Cat and Kittens – Always Surprising People – Teetotaller for Ever – The Washerwoman’s Anger – Vented his Rage on Dr. Hobbs – Loosing His Feathers – Sacrilege to Doubt – “People Won’t Believe That” – Governor Cairns. 259

CHAPTER X

Mr. Andrew Petrie’s Loss of Sight – Walked His Room in Agony – Blind for Twenty-four Years – Overlooking the Workmen – Never Could be Imposed Upon – His Wonderful Power of Feeling – Walter Petrie’s Early Death – Drowned in the Present Creek Street – Only Twenty-two Years – Insight into the Unseen – “You Will Find My Poor Boy Down There in the Creek” – A Very Peculiar Coincidence – Walter Petrie’s Great Strength – First Brisbane Boat Races. 267

CHAPTER XI

Great Changes in One Lifetime – How Shells and Coral Were Obtained for Lime-making – King Island or “Winnam” – Lime-burning on Petrie’s Bight – Diving Work – Harris’s Wharf – A Trick to Obtain “Grog” – Reads Like Romance – Narrow Escape of a Diver. 275

CHAPTER XII

Characters in the Way of “Old Hands” – Material for a Charles Dickens – “Cranky Tom” – “Deaf Mickey” – Knocked Silly in Logan’s Time – “Wonder How Long I’ve Been Buried” – Scene in the Road Which is Now Queen Street – A Peculiar Court Case – First Brisbane Cemetery. 279

LIST OF PLACES, NAMES, PLANTS, AND TREES 285

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS


Tom Petrie	II
Aboriginal Baby	14
Catchpenny or "Gwai-A"(Bribie Tribe)	44
Poinciana Tree At "Murrumba"	68
Kitty or "Bournbobian"	104
Sam or "Puttingga". Only Living Member of Brisbane Tribe	108
Durramboi	127
Jackie (Burpengary Creek)	143
Ferry In 1850	155
"Murrumba"	162
King Sandy or "Ker-Walu"(Toorbal Point or Ningi Ningi Tribe)	176
Andrew Petrie (Senior)	198
Andrew Petrie's Tree on Summit of Mount Petrie	225
Andrew Petrie's House on Petrie's Bight	248
Brisbane In 1858-9	254
"Warraba", Sir J. P. Bell's Blackboy	256
Plan of Brisbane Town in 1839	292

PART I

CHAPTER I



Tom Petrie – Andrew Petrie – Moreton Bay in the Thirties – Petrie’s Bight – First Steamer in the River – “Tom’s” Childhood – “Kabon-Tom” – Brisbane or Turrbal Tribe – North Pine Forty-five years ago – Alone with the Blacks – Their Trustworthiness and Consideration – Arsenic in Flour – Black Police – Shooting the Blacks – Inhuman Cruelty – St. Helena Murder – Bribie Island Murder.

erhaps no one now living knows more from personal experience of the ways and habits of the Queensland Aborigines than does my father – Tom Petrie. His experiences amongst these fast-dying-out people are unique, and the reminiscences of his early life in this colony should be recorded ; therefore I take up my pen with the wish to do the little I can in that way. My father has spent his life in Queensland, being but three months old when leaving his native land. He was born at Edinburgh, and came out here with his parents in the *Stirling Castle* in 1831. He is now the only surviving son of the late Andrew Petrie, a civil engineer, who, as every one interested knows, had much to do with Queensland’s young days.

The Petrie family landed first in New South Wales, but in 1837 (about twelve years after foundation of Brisbane) came on to Queensland in the *James Watt*, “the first steamer which ever entered what are now Queensland waters”. The late John Petrie, the eldest son, was a boy at the time, and “Tom”, of course, but a child. Their father, the founder of the family, was attached to the Royal Engineers in Sydney, and was chosen to fill the position of superintendent or engineer of works in Brisbane. The Commandant in the latter place had been driven to petition for the services of a competent official, as there seemed no end to the blunders and mistakes always being made. The family came as far as Dunwich in the *James Watt*, then finished

the journey in the pilot boat, manned by convicts, and landed at the King's Jetty – the present Queen's Wharf – the only landing place then existing.

Although my father cannot look back to this day of arrival, he remembers Brisbane town as a city of about ten buildings. Roughly speaking it was like this : At the present Trouton's corner stood a building used as the first Post Office, and joined to it was the watchhouse ; then further down the prisoners' barracks extended from above Chapman's to the corner (Grimes & Petty). Where the Treasury stands stood the soldiers' barracks, and the Government hospitals and doctors' quarters took up the land the Supreme Court now occupies. The Commandant's house stood where the new Lands Office is being built (his garden extending along the river bank), and not far away was the Chaplain's quarters. The Commissariat Stores were afterwards called the Colonial Stores, and the block of land from the Longreach Hotel to Gray's corner was occupied by the "lumber yard" (where the prisoners made their own clothes, etc.). The windmill was what is now the Observatory, and, lastly, a place formerly used as a female factory was the building Mr. Andrew Petrie lived in for several months till his own house was built. The factory stood on the ground now occupied by the Post Office, and later on the Petrie's house was built at the present corner of Wharf and Queen Streets, going towards the Bight (hence the name Petrie's Bight). Their garden stretched all along the river bank where Thomas Brown and Sons' warehouse now stands, being bounded at the far end by the salt-water creek which ran up Creek Street.

Kangaroo Point, New Farm, South Brisbane, and a lot of North Brisbane were then under cultivation, but the rest was 'all bush, which at that time swarmed with Aborigines. So thick was the bush round Petrie's Bight that one of the workmen (a prisoner) engaged in building the house there was speared ; he wasn't much hurt, however, and recovered. While living at the Bight when a boy my father remembers watching the first steamer which ever came up the river (the James Watt stayed in the Bay). When she rounded Kangaroo Point, with her paddles going, the blacks, who were collected together watching, could not make it out, and took fright, running as though for their lives. They were easily frightened in those days. Father remembers another occasion on which they were terrified. His father one night got hold of a pumpkin, and hollowing it out, formed on one side a face, which he lit up by placing a candle inside, the light shining through the openings of the eyes and mouth. This head he put on a pole, and then wrapping himself in a sheet with the pole, he looked to the frightened blacks' imagination for all the world like a ghost, and they could hardly get away fast enough.

From early childhood "Tom" was often with the blacks, and since there was no school to go to, and hardly a white child to play with, he naturally chummed in with all the little dark children, and learned their language, which to this day he can speak fluently. A pretty, soft-sounding language it is on his lips, but rather the opposite when spoken by later comers ; indeed, I do not think that any white man unaccustomed to it from childhood can ever successfully master the pronunciation.

"Tom", and his only sister, when children used to hide out among the bushes, in order to watch the blacks during a fight ; and once when the boy had been severely punished by his father for smoking, he ran away from home, and after his people had looked everywhere, they found him at length in the blacks' camp out Bowen Hills way. There was one blackfellow at that time these children used to torment rather unmercifully : a very fierce old man, feared even by the blacks, who believed he could do anything he choose in the way of causing death, etc. He was called "Mindi-Mindi" (or "Kabon-Tom" by the whites), was the head of a small fishing tribe who generally camped at the mouth of the South Pine river, and was a great warrior. One day the children found him outside their home. They teased and called him names in his own tongue till the man grew so fierce that he chased the youngsters right inside. The girl got under a bed, and "Tom" up on a chair, where the blackfellow caught him, and taking his head in his hands started to screw his neck. One hand held the boy's chin and the other the top of his head, and in a few minutes more his life would have ended, but the screams brought the mother just in time. Father's neck was stiff for some time after this, and the children never tormented old "Kabon-Tom" again. They declared always that this man had a perfectly blue tongue, and the palms of his hands were quite white. It was said that he screwed his own little daughter's neck, and thought nothing of such things. However, he and "Tom" were generally friends, indeed this is about the only occasion on which the boy fell out with a blackfellow. "Kabon-Tom" must have been about ninety when he died, and was a very white-haired old man. He was found lying dead one day in the mud in the Brisbane river.

Later on in life, when my father employed the blacks, they were always kind and considerate about him. They are naturally an affectionate people, and he with his good and kindly disposition, and his fun — for the blacks do so enjoy a joke — was very popular with them all. Nowadays it is seldom one sees an Aboriginal, but some years ago, when they would come at times and camp round about here (North Pine), it was amusing to see the excitement when they found their old friend in the mood for a yarn. To watch their faces was as good as a play, and to hear Father talk with them ! — it seemed all

such nonsense, and many a time has some one looking on been convulsed with laughter. A good-natured people they surely are, for amusement at their expense does not call forth resentment; rather would they join in the laugh.

Queensland is a large country, and the tribes in the North differ in their languages, habits, and beliefs from the blacks about Brisbane. Father was very familiar with the Brisbane tribe (Turrbal), and several other tribes all belonging to Southern Queensland who had different languages, but the same habits, etc. The Turrbal language was spoken as far inland as Gold Creek or Moggill, as far north as North Pine, and south to the Logan, but my father could also speak to and understand any black from Ipswich, as far north as Mount Perry, or from Frazer, Bribie, Stradbroke, and Moreton Islands. Of all the blackfellows who were boys when he was a boy there is only one survivor ; most of them died off prematurely through drink, introduced by the white man.

On first coming, nearly forty-five years ago, to North Pine, which is sixteen miles by road from Brisbane, the country round about was all wild bush, and the land my father took up was a portion of the Whiteside run. The blacks were very good and helpful, lending a hand to split and fence and put up stockyards, and they would help look after the cattle and yard them at night. For the young fellow was all alone, no white man would come near him, being in dread of the blacks. Here he was among two hundred of them, and came to no harm.

When with their help he had got a yard made, and a hut erected, he obtained flour, tea, sugar, and tobacco from Brisbane, and leaving these rations in the hut, in charge of an old Aboriginal, went again to Brisbane, and was away this time a fortnight. Fifty head of cattle he also left in the charge of two young blacks, trusting them to yard these at night, etc ; and to enable the young darkies to do this, he allowed them each the use of a horse and saddle. On his return all was as it should be, not even a bit of tobacco missing ! And those who know no better say the Aborigines are treacherous and untrustworthy ! Father says he could always trust them ; and his experience has been that if you treated them kindly they would do anything for you.

On the occasion just mentioned during his absence, a station about nine miles away ran short of rations, and the stockman was sent armed with a carbine and a pair of pistols to see if he could borrow from Father. Arrived at his destination, the man found but blacks, and they simply would give him nothing until the master's return. The hut had no doors at the time, and yet they hunted for their own food, touching nothing.

A further refutation of the treachery and untrustworthiness of the blacks is the following : — One young fellow, learning to ride in those days, was thrown several times. My father, vexed with the mare ridden, mounted her himself, and giving the animal a sharp cut with his riding whip, sent her off at full gallop. He carried a revolver in his belt, which he always had handy, as often the blacks would get him to shoot kangaroos they had surrounded and hunted into a water-hole. The mare galloped on, then, stopping suddenly, somehow threw her rider in spite of his good seat. The first thing he remembered afterwards was seeing a company of blacks collected round him, crying, and one old man on his knees sucking his back, where the hammer of the revolver had struck. They then carried him to his hut, and in the morning he was nothing but stiff after his adventure. And there was no white man about !

Many a time when the blacks wished to gather their tribes together for a corroboree (dance and song), or fight, they would send on two men to inquire of Father which way to come so as not to disturb his cattle. This was more than many a white man would do, he says. To him they were always kind and thoughtful, and he wishes this to be clearly understood, for sometimes the blacks are very much blamed for deeds they were really driven to ; and of course they resented unkindness. For instance, the owner of a station some distance away used to have his cattle speared and killed, Father would remonstrate and ask the why, and the blacks would answer : It was because if that man caught any of them he would shoot them down like dogs ! Then they told this tale : A number of blacks were on the man's run, scattered here and there, looking for wild honey and opossums, when the owner came upon them and shooting one young fellow, first broke his leg, then another shot in the head killed him. The superior white man then hid himself to watch what would happen. Presently the father came looking for his son, and he was shot ; the mother coming after met the same fate.

My father knew the blacks well who told him this, and was satisfied they spoke truthfully. It may strike the reader why did he not make use of his information and bring punishment to the offender ? Well, because in those days a blackfellow's evidence counted as nothing, and no good would therefore be gained, but rather the opposite, as the bitterness would be increased, and the blacks get the worst of it. You see, the white men had so many opportunities for working harm ; at that time several Aborigines were poisoned through eating stolen flour, it having been carefully left in a hut with arsenic in it.

To show that the Aborigines were not unforgiving, here is an example :

The squatter before mentioned, who shot the blacks, went once to Father to see if he would use his influence with the Aborigines and get them to go to his station and drive wild cattle from the mountain scrub – a difficult undertaking. He agreed to see what could be done, on condition that the blacks were considerately treated, and advised the man to leave all firearms behind, and accompany him to their camp, where he would do his best. “Oh, no ! I can’t do that”, was the reply. “If you won’t come to the camp”, replied Father, “they will not understand, and won’t go ; you need fear nothing ; they will not touch you while I’m there.”

After some discussion, the man was persuaded, though he evidently was in fear and trembling during the whole interview. The blacks agreed to go next day, which they did, leaving their gins and pickannies under Father’s care till their return. In three days they were back, and reported they had got a number of cattle from the scrub, and that the man – “John Master” they called him – had killed a bull for them to eat, and was all right now, not “saucy” any more. They added that they had agreed to go back again, and strip bark for him.

This second time the blacks took their women folk and children, and were away for two or three weeks working for the squatter, cutting bark, etc., and were evidently quite contented and happy. However, in the meantime a report was got up on the station to the effect that the blacks were killing some of the cattle ; so a man was sent to where Sandgate now is to ask assistance from the black police, who were stationed there.

These black police were Aborigines from New South Wales’ and distant places, and they, with their white leader, came and shot several blacks, the remaining poor things returning at once to their friend in a great state, protesting they had not touched a beast. Father met the squatter soon after, and said to him : “You’re a nice sort of fellow ; how could you cause those poor blacks to be shot like that ? You know perfectly well they did not kill your cattle.” The man excused himself by saying that it was done without his knowledge, that he had a young fellow learning station work who got frightened over the blacks, and went for the police on his own account.

Another time, while out riding in the bush, my father heard a great row, and a voice calling, “Round them up, boys !” And on galloping up he came upon a number of poor blacks – men, women, and children – all in a mob like so many wild cattle, surrounded by the mounted black police. The poor creatures tried to run to their friend for protection, and he inquired of the officer in charge what was the meaning of it all. The officer – a white man, and one, by the way, who was noted for his inhuman cruelty – replied that

they merely wished to see who was who. But Father knew that if he hadn't turned up, a number of the poor things would have been shot. Can one wonder there were murders committed by the blacks, seeing how they were sometimes treated ? This same police officer (Wheeler, by name), later on was to have been hanged for whipping a poor creature to death, but he escaped and fled from the country. It is possible he is still alive. His victim was a young blackfellow, whom he had tied to a verandah post, and then brutally flogged till he died.

Three men were once murdered at St. Helena Island by Aborigines, and this is the side of the question given by "Billy Dingy" (so called by the whites), one of the blacks concerned. Billy said that he and two other young men, each with his young wife, were taken in a boat by three white men, who promised to land them at Bribie Island, as it was then the great "bunya season", and the Aborigines always met there before travelling to the Bunya Mountains (or, to be correct, Bon-yi Mountains — the natives always pronounced it so). Of the "bon-yi season" I will speak later on.

Well, these men, instead of doing as they had promised, landed at St. Helena, and there set nets for catching dugong, acting as though they had not the slightest intention of going near Bribie. They also took possession of the young gins, paying no heed to Billy, who pleaded for their wives and to be taken to Bribie as promised. So Billy, poor soul, didn't know what to do, and at last bethought him to kill the men. He did it in this way : Some distance from where they were camped a cask was sunk in the sand for fresh water, and Billy, in broken English, called to one of the men. Bob Hunter by name : "Bob, Bob, come quick, bring gun, plenty duck sit down longa here." Bob went to Billy all unthinking, and, passing the cask in the sand knelt to drink. There was Billy's chance, and he took it, striking the man from behind with a tomahawk on the back of the head. Bob threw up his arm to save himself, only to be cut on the arm, and then again on the head, and was killed. Billy then dragged him down to the water ; and that was the end of that man.

On returning to the camp after this "deed of darkness", Billy told the gins in his own language of what had happened, and that he meant to finish by killing the other two, and they then could all get away together. The gins begged of him not to kill the others, but his mind was fixed, and remained unmoved. Fortline favoured him surely, for he found one man alone sitting by a camp fire smoking, and, creeping up stealthily behind him, cut open his head with the tomahawk ; and this man's body was in turn dragged to the water.

There now remained but one other, and he at that time away in the scrub shooting pigeons. Billy followed, and, watching his opportunity, struck the white man as he stooped to go under a vine. This last body was also dragged to the water, and that was the end of the three ; and who can say the blacks were wholly to blame ?

After the white men were thus disposed of, the natives all got into the boat and came to the mouth of the Pine River, where they left the boat, and walking round on the mainland opposite Bribie, swam across to the island. Bob Hunter's body was afterwards recovered, and it had a cut on the arm even as Billy described to my father. The other bodies were never found, and it was thought they were eaten by sharks.


My father had these three men — Billy and the others — working for him afterwards till their death, and found them all right. He was also alone for days with Billy in the forest looking for cedar timber.

An old man called Gray was killed at Bribie Island (July, 1849). This is the blacks' version as told to their friend : Gray used to go to Bribie with a cutter for oysters ; he had a blackboy as a help when gathering the oysters on the bank, and he imagined this boy wasn't fast enough in his work, so beat him rather unmercifully, being blest with a bad temper. The boy escaped and ran away from the oyster bank, swimming to the island, and he told the blacks of his ill-treatment. They were worked up to resentment, and went across and killed Gray. Father says of the latter : "I knew poor old Gray well ; he was a very cross old man, and many a slap on the side of the head I got from him when a boy."

CHAPTER II



Bonyi Season on the Blackall Range – Gatherings like Picnics – Born Mimics – “Cry for the Dead” – Treated like a Prince – Caboolture (Kabul-tur) – Superstitions of the Blacks – Climbing the Bonyi – Gathering the Nuts – Number at these Feasts – Their Food while there – Willingness to Share.

AVING given some instances as proof of the statement that the blacks were murderers or quite otherwise, according to the white man’s treatment of them, I will pass now to their native customs, and tell you of the “Bon-yi season.” “Bon-yi,” the native name for the pine, *Araucaria Bidwilli*, has been wrongly accepted and pronounced bunya. To the blacks it was bon-yi, the “i” being sounded as an “e” in English, “bon-ye”. Grandfather (Andrew Petrie) discovered this tree, but he gave some specimens to a Mr. Bidwill, who forwarded them to the old country, and hence the tree was named after him, not after the true discoverer. Of this more anon.

The bon-yi tree bears huge cones, full of nuts, which the natives are very fond of. Each year the trees will bear a few cones, but it was only in every third year that the great gatherings of the natives took place, for then it was that the trees bore a heavy crop, and the blacks never failed to know the season.

These gatherings were really like huge picnics, the Aborigines belonging to the district sending messengers out to invite members from other tribes to come and have a feast. Perhaps fifteen would be asked here, and thirty there, and they were mostly young people, who were able and fit to travel. Then these tribes would in turn ask others. For instance, the Bribie blacks (Ngunda tribe) on receiving their invitation would perchance invite the Turrbal people to join them, and the latter would then ask the Logan, or Yaggapal tribe, and other island blacks, and so on from tribe to tribe all over the country, for the different tribes were generally connected by marriage, and the relatives thus invited each other. Those near at hand would all turn up, old and young, but the tribes from afar would leave the aged and the sick behind.

My father was present at one of these feasts when a boy for over a fortnight. He is the only free white man who has ever been present at a bon-yi feast. Two or three convicts in the old days, who escaped and lived afterwards with the blacks – James Davis (“Duramboi”), Bracefield (“Wandi”), and Fahey (“Gilbury”), of course, knew all about it, but they are dead now. Father met the two former after their return to civilisation, and he has often had a yarn with the old blacks who belonged to the tribes they had lived with.

In those early days the Blackall Range was spoken of as the Bon-yi Mountains, and it was there that Duramboi and Bracefield joined in the feasts, and there also that Father saw it all. He was only fourteen or fifteen years old at the time, and travelled from Brisbane with a party of about one hundred, counting the women and children. They camped the first night at Bu-yu-ba (shin of leg), the native name for the creek crossing at what is now known as Enoggera.

After the camp fires were made and breakwinds of bushes put up as a protection from the night, the party all had something to eat, then gathered comfortably round the fires, and settled themselves ready for some good old yams, till sleep would claim them for his own. Tales were told of what forefathers did, how wonderful some of them were in hunting and killing game, also in fighting. The blacks have lively imaginations of what happened years ago, and some of the incidents they remembered of their big fights, etc., were truly marvellous ! They are also born mimics, and my father has often felt sore with laughing at the way they would take off people, and strut about, and imitate all sorts of animals.

When Aborigines are collected anywhere together, each morning at daylight a great cry arises, breaking through the silence : this is the “cry for the dead.” Imagine it, falling on the stillness after the night ! It comes with the dawn and the first call of the birds ; as the Australian bush awakens and stirs, so do Australia’s dark children – or, rather they used to, for all is changed now. It must have been weird, that wailing noise and crying ; but one could imagine the birds and animals expecting it and listening for it ; and the sun in those days would surely have thought something had gone wrong, had there been no great cry to accompany his arising. Whether the dead were the better for the mourning who can say ? But they were always faithfully mourned for, each morning, and at dusk each night. It was crying and wailing and cursing all mixed up together, and was kept going for from ten to twenty minutes, such a noise being made that it was scarcely possible to hear oneself speak. Each person vowed vengeance on their relative’s murderer, swearing all the time. To them it was an oath when they called