

## Turtles' Eggs as Food.

BY A. MUSGRAVE.

IN the MUSEUM MAGAZINE April-June, 1926, appeared an article entitled, "From Sea to Soup: An Account of the Turtles of North-west Islet," by Mr. G. P. Whitley and myself. This article has been widely read, and the following letter received from Mr. H. W. Champion, of Port Moresby, gives some interesting facts about the value of turtles' eggs to the Papuans.

In your very interesting article in the "Museum Magazine" on the Turtle you say that the eggs are not palatable as a food. This surprises me, as among all the coastal natives of this Territory turtle eggs are eaten with relish. It would not be too much to say, I think, that the natives place them high as an article of food. It might be said by the ignorant that "cannibals" will eat anything, but the Motu people for instance have, so far as I know, never been cannibals and appear to hold such a practice in as much detestation as we do, and though less fastidious in their tastes than we are, are a very clean eating people.

I can assure you too, that more than one white-man has told me he likes turtle eggs to eat, not only in conjunction with other food, such as puddings, but poached in a frying pan like bird's eggs. Natives occasionally hawk them for sale

among Europeans. I have had them offered to me here in Port Moresby on several occasions, but I have never had the courage to try what they were like to eat.

Our statement was based on the experience of members of our party who tried them *fried* but, however, did not care for the somewhat unsavoury appearance of the dish, the uncoagulated white and gritty-looking yolk not appealing to their palates. We were aware that turtles' eggs are relished by the natives of the Pacific and elsewhere, a fact well recorded, but the views set forth in our article were based solely on our knowledge and experience of the turtles of the Capricorn Group. Since receiving Mr. Champion's letter, Mr. A. A. Livingstone of the Museum staff while on a visit to the Santa Cruz Group, has tried turtles' eggs *boiled*, and, unlike our companions on the Capricorn Island trip, considers them to be quite as palatable as fowls' eggs. It would appear then, that much depends on the palate of the taster.

## Museum Postcards.

IN our last issue reference was made to the forthcoming issue of coloured postcards.

The first series, comprising thirty Australian bird studies, is now practically complete and will, therefore, be available for distribution shortly. This series will be followed by one of mammals.

The object of issuing these cards is the great need for accurately drawn pictures of our native fauna, for which there is a constant demand from educational institutions. The drawings have been prepared by Lilian M. Medland (Mrs. Tom Iredale) and each design has been carefully reviewed by Professor Launcelot Harrison, B.A., B.Sc. Coupled with such care in preparation, is four colour printing of a very high standard. It can be fully claimed, therefore, that in these cards will be found that which has been long sought for.

The bird series has been divided into six sets of five cards each, as enumerated below, and each set is accompanied by an informative leaflet written in popular terms. The

price is nominal, 1/- per set of five, but to educational institutions there will be allowed a discount of 20 per cent, on all purchases (direct from the Museum) to the value of £1 and upwards.

Set A1. Emu, Plain Turkey or Bustard, Brolga or Native Companion, Native Hen, Scrub Fowl.

Set A2. Top-Knot Pigeon, Black Swan, Wedge-tailed Eagle, White Goshawk, Boobook Owl.

Set A3. Rosella, Banksian Cockatoo, Fan-tailed Cuckoo, Frogmouth, Kookaburra.

Set A4. Lyre Bird, Jacky Winter or Brown Flycatcher, Red-capped Robin, Whistler or White-throated Thickhead, Willie Wagtail or Black and White Fantail.

Set A5. Elfin Wren or Red-backed Wren, Fairy Wren or Blue Wren, Emu Wren, Gouldian Finch, Scarlet Honeyeater.

Set A6. Regent Honeyeater, Gillbird or Wattle Bird, Black-backed Magpie, Satin Bower Bird, Raven.

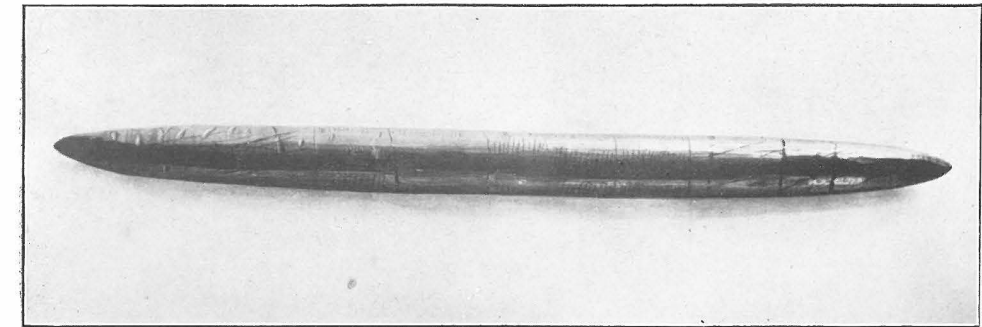
## Aboriginal Message Sticks.

BY W. W. THORPE.

AS an aid to our memory we frequently tie a knot in our handkerchief or make a note in our pocket book. The Australian aborigine has, of course, to resort to some other means to jog his mind and these reminders take the form of what white men term, variously, "message or memory sticks," or "blackfellows' letters." These sticks take different forms, some being flat, others round or rounded, and are either plain or carved. Dr. W. E. Roth, who for many years was Protector of Aborigines in

which was known to be hostile—for aborigines, like most others, are always glad to receive tidings and messages.

These sticks are of great use in trading, for many trade routes are of great length and in journeying along them the bearer would have to traverse many territories. In northern Queensland there is one that approaches five hundred miles in length, and in Western Australia there is another that, starting from the north-west, zig-zags its way to the South Australian border.



Passport from the Lake Way District, East Murchison, Western Australia.

[Photo.—G. C. Clutton.]

Queensland and knew their ways well, believes that the markings had no relation to the message carried by the bearer, and in support of his contention he states that on one occasion when he had been entrusted with a communication he purposely mislaid the stick and was subsequently handed another which was dissimilar. In his opinion the stick was merely a guarantee of good faith to show that there was no gammon. He also states that he has known of sticks being utilised more than once, that is covering two or more messages. It has been suggested that the markings are pictographic, which in a few instances would seem to be true, but nevertheless it is clear that Dr. Roth's opinion that the stick proves the *bona fides* of the bearer is the more reasonable, for he was always treated with respect even when passing through country

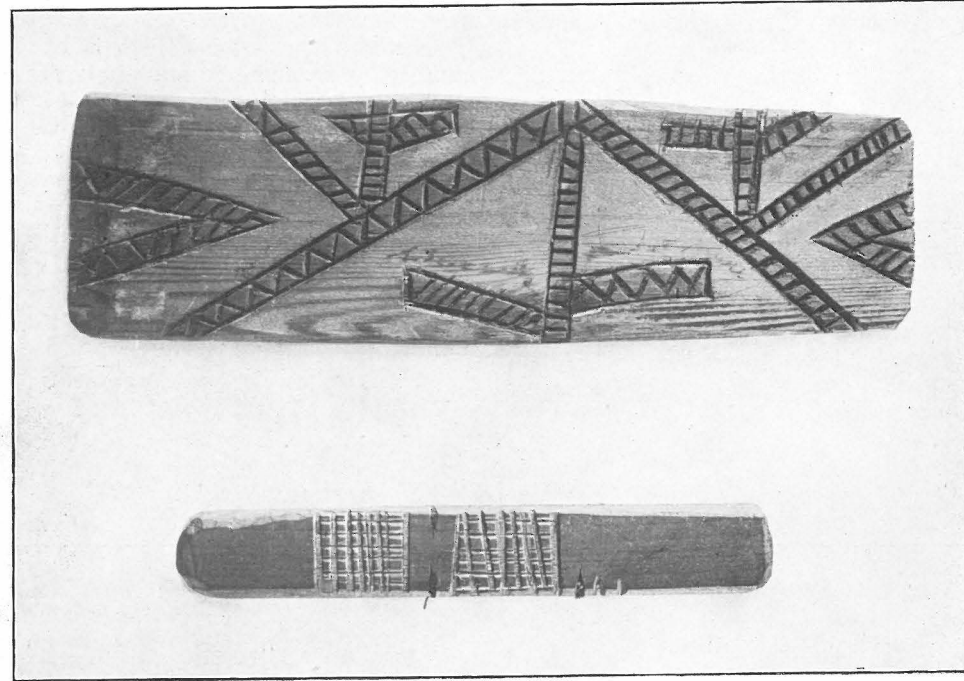
Trade and barter are intimately linked with these implements—if one may so term them. What is wanted by one aboriginal, and cannot be obtained from his own hunting ground, he has to obtain elsewhere. Maybe he requires some flint from which to manufacture spear heads or tomahawks, or something else that will enable him to obtain the necessities of life. Knowing where this essential commodity may be had, and not being able to go personally, he despatches a friend whom he provides with a message stick. This friend arriving at his destination produces his warrant, thus establishing his *bona fides*, and states his quest. The head man probably recognises the markings, if there be any, as the "sign manual" of the sender, or else the characteristics, and hands over the goods required.



The payment in kind may involve another trip, or perhaps the headman will despatch a messenger, armed with the same "stick," to state and obtain his needs. It will thus be seen that the stick plays a very important part in native life.

Dawson, who wrote nearly fifty years ago, gives a very graphic account of the use of the message stick in western Victoria:—"When a chief has a matter of great im-

portance to settle, and desires the advice and assistance of friendly tribes, he despatches two messengers to the nearest chief with a message-stick. This message-stick is a piece of wood about six inches long and one inch in diameter, with five or six sides, one of these indicating by notches the number of men required from each. The messengers are not allowed to explain the business of the proposed meeting. Immediately on a chief receiving the message-stick, he sends for his principal men, who



"Message" or "Memory" Sticks. The larger flat specimen carried with it a challenge to fight, the smaller a reply. The following are the messages accompanying each respectively:—"From Billy Brookes to Jack Gerambey. We want you to bring all boys from Tully, Cedar Creek and Glenalis to fight Goldfield mob, Marraber, Tinaroo, Barron River, Geranda, and Atherton boys; fight take place Scrubby Creek next Sunday." "Jack Gerambey to Billy Brookes. Can't come down till after Christmas; wait two weeks more, we come with the Tully and Cedar Creek boys. Tully boys want spell after big walk-about. All boys will be at Scrubby Creek to meet you in two weeks." Atherton, Cairns District, Queensland. [Photo.—G. C. Clutton.]

pass their hands down the stick, and ascertain the number of men required from the tribe. They then decide who are to be sent. The stick is next forwarded by messengers from the tribe to the nearest chief, who sends it on to the rest, and so on until all are summoned. The most distant tribe starts first, and joining the others in succession, all arrive in a body at the camp of the chief who sent for them.

They are accompanied by their wives, but not by children, or by very old persons. In the evening, when the children of the tribe and the women have gone to bed, the chiefs decide what is to be done; each chief tells his people what is required, and all retire for the night."

Besides the stick emblematic tokens were often carried. For instance if the message was the notification of an initiation ceremony, a bullroarer accompanied the message stick. Similarly, a man's apron impaled on the

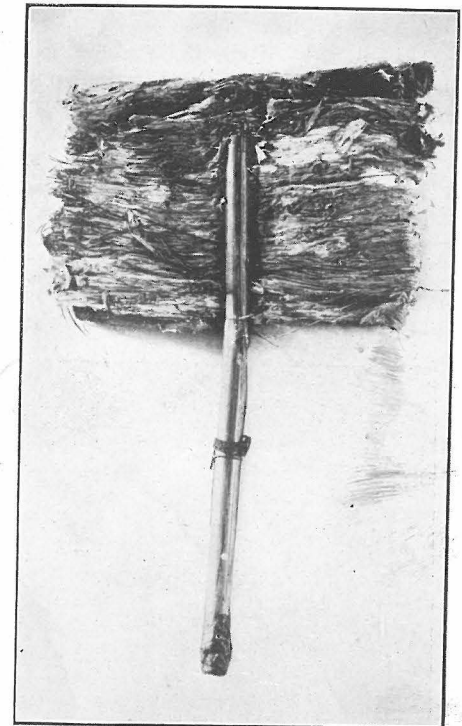
point of a spear implied war; or a mass of pipe-clay, an emblem of mourning, prepared the visited camp for news of a death.

The method of carrying messages in a cleft stick, as practised by the African tribes, has been introduced into the Northern Territory. The written message which is enclosed in ti-tree (*Melaleuca*) bark, and carried by the messenger after the manner of a little flag.

When Sir Baldwin Spencer and the late F. J. Gillen were carrying out their investigations in Central Australia some years ago, they met with an instance of this which I quote here as it is of some interest. "Towards evening we were surprised to see two strange natives coming into our camp, one of them carrying what they call a 'paper yabber.' It turned out that our friend Mr. Kell had very kindly sent out after us some messages which had come along the line for us after our departure from Powell Creek. The two men had followed us up for just one hundred and ninety miles, carrying the 'paper yabber' in a cleft stick. Though they had come through strange tribes, first the Umbaia and then the Gnanji, yet so long as they carried this emblem of the fact that they were messengers, they were perfectly safe. The natives are quite accustomed to messengers travelling from tribe to tribe to summon groups to take part in sacred ceremonies. Such messengers always carry a token of some kind—very often a sacred stick or bull-roarer. Their persons are always safe, and so the same safety is granted to natives carrying 'paper yabbers' for the white man. These two men had travelled ninety miles in the last three days so as to overtake us. They were perfectly happy when they reached us, the sense of having been successful in their work being apparently quite sufficient to satisfy them—with, of course, in addition, a plenteous supply of food and tobacco when they reached us. They spent the night in camp and left us next morning with a good stack of flour, meat and tobacco, and a pipe and a knife for each of them, quite cheerful at the prospect of a return journey of nearly two hundred miles to their own camp at Powell Creek. Their only luggage, apart from food, was a spear and a spear-thrower.

"These 'paper yabbers' are a mystery to the unsophisticated native. On one

occasion a friend of ours sent a native with a small parcel of tobacco to a camp some distance away. At the same time he sent a note saying how many sticks the parcel contained. As a general rule a package as this would be delivered intact, but the native knew what it contained and the temptation to open it and abstract a few sticks was



Message Carrier; a modern innovation. A written message is wrapped in paper-bark, inserted in cleft stick, and carried in this condition.

South Alligator River, Northern Territory. [Photo.—G. C. Clutton.]

too strong. When, on his arrival, he was taxed with the theft, he was highly indignant with the 'paper yabber,' because he had hidden it away in a hollow tree trunk while he opened the parcel, in order that it could not possibly see what he was doing, and he thought that it had, in some unfair way, found out what he had done and told the white man."

In the Australian ethnological gallery of this Museum may be seen a very fine series of these sticks illustrating their diversity of form and markings.