

## PRIMITIVE LETTERS

### *How the Blacks Send Messages*

*You must have wondered what had become of Captain Coldweather and Tom Barnacle. So had we. You remember the last we heard of them was that they were having the yacht repaired in the Fitzroy River, and were planning to go on farther north? That was weeks ago, and several times Mrs. Noah has said to Bosun Bill: "I do hope Sol. and Tom are all right."*

*Bill always answered cheerfully that they knew how to look after themselves, but all the same he was very pleased last week to receive a wire from Gladstone: "Had a good time. Coming south S.C. and T.B." (which, of course, stood for Solomon Coldweather and Tom Barnacle.*

**M**R. NOAH was so excited. She snatched the wire from Bill and read it several times. "It doesn't say where they've been or what they've been doing, or when they'll be here," she said in a disappointed voice.

"You can't expect much in a tele-

gram," Bill consoled her. "Writing letters was never a strong point with either of them. Besides, think how lucky we are to have such an invention as the telegraph. Look, it's only an hour since that was lodged."

"You're right," agreed Mrs. Noah. "It must have been very trying waiting for news in the old days, before there were trains or cars. Imagine now if a man on a horse had to bring your letters hundreds of miles."

"Yes," said Bill, "and if people couldn't write it would be still slower. Look at the way the aborigines used to manage, by sending messengers on foot for great distances."

"**I** ALWAYS thought the blacks wrote their letters on sticks," remarked Mrs. Noah.

"Well, they certainly were a method

Mrs. Noah.

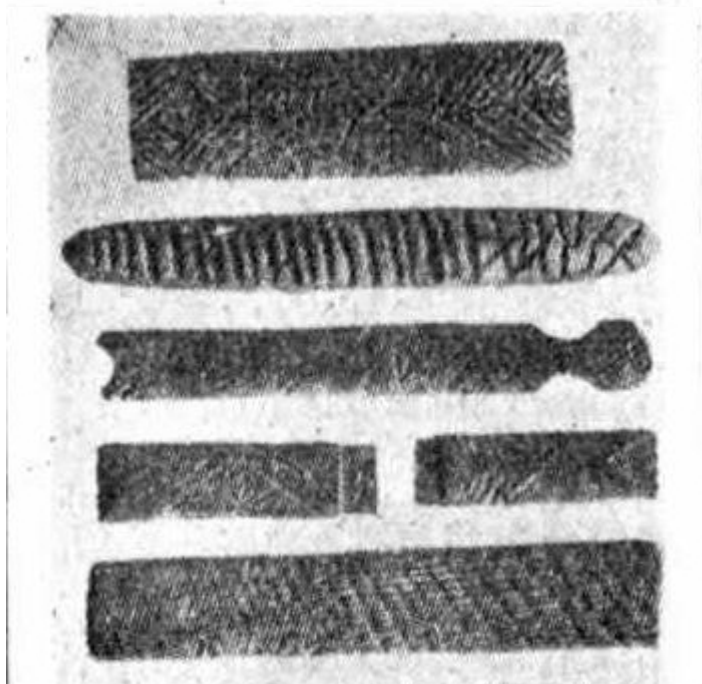
"Well, they certainly gave a marked stick to the messenger to carry," said Bill, "but in many cases the stick itself really meant nothing in particular, except that it acted as a sort of passport. Dr. W. E. Roth, who was once Protector of Aborigines in Queensland, and studied their ways carefully, said that one man would be sent to tell something to the chief of another tribe, and he would be given a particular kind of stick to prove that he was a genuine messenger."

"Oh," said Mrs. Noah, "I always thought the different markings meant something."

"Sometimes they do, I believe," said Bill. "For instance, if a chief wanted a number of men to help him fight, he would put a certain number of notches on the stick."

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SOMETIMES the blacks carry messages for white men," remarked Bill, "and in the Northern Territory they have adopted the method of the African tribes, of carrying a letter in a cleft stick. The sender wraps it in bark, and fixes it firmly in the fork. They can travel for hundreds of miles quite safely like that, because the hostile tribes always respect a messenger."





MESSAGE STICKS OF NORTH

