

STRANGE THINGS I HAVE SEEN.

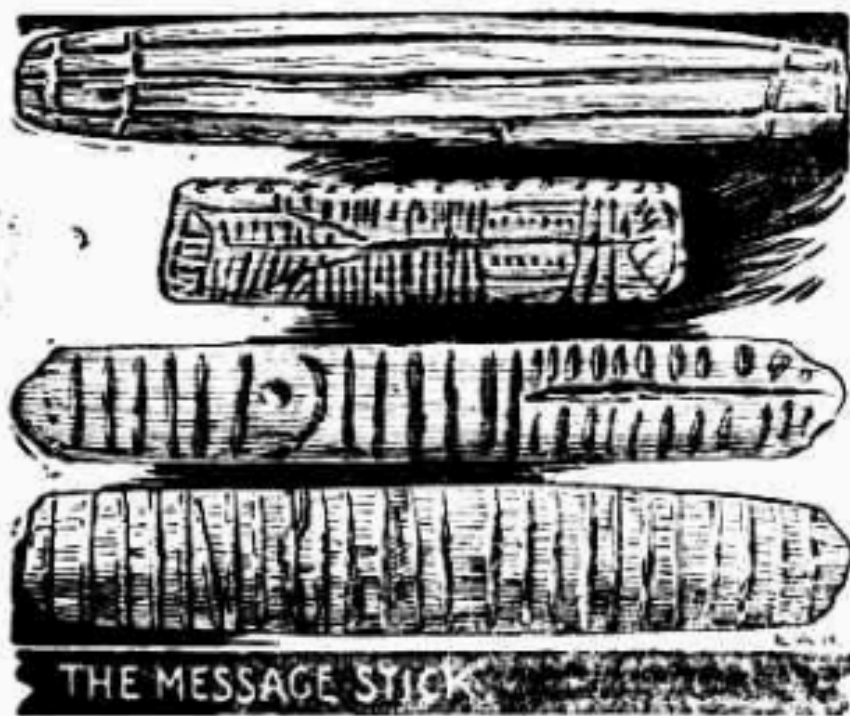
by Ion L. Idriess

IT IS GENERALLY supposed that the message stick of the Australian aboriginal is but "playabout"; that it holds no definite message. This is not always the case. Though the symbols on the stick are not letters, still they represent a memorized message to be delivered by the runner.

Recently, while travelling in the furtherest Kimberleys with a police patrol we camped near a native horde. It had been a stern hunt; the wanted natives continually evaded the patrol, apparently kept informed of our movements. From the horde, I bought a message stick. The runner who had carried it interpreted it before the patrol. The message warned the horde that a patrol was coming, and directed them to give misleading information. It stated that the patrol had already captured Coodogedogo who had killed Burrin; that the patrol now sought Ungandongery who had helped Coodogedogo. It urged these natives to send a warning message to Ungandongery at Mt. Elizabeth.

The strange thing is that the natives saw no harm in interpreting the message. To them, as the stick had been delivered, the message symbols on it had ceased to have meaning.

This phase of aboriginal mentality is very confusing to us.



THE MESSAGE STICK