

THE USE OF THE WOMERAH, OR "THROW STICK"
BY THE ABORIGINES OF TASMANIA.

[By ALFRED J. TAYLOR, F.L.S.]

In the course of a discussion that followed a lecture I delivered recently on the Aborigines of Tasmania, Mr. Thomas Lewis, a member of this Society, referred to the use of the "Womerah," or "Throw Stick" by our natives. This was the first time I had heard of the instrument being used by the aborigines of Tasmania. There is no record of their use of it in any of the works dealing with their history, nor is the Womerah preserved in any of our Ethnological Collections of Tasmanian Weapons, etc. On the contrary, Ronald Gunn, F.R.S., informed Mr. R. Brough Smythe, who has duly recorded the statement in his account of the aborigines of Tasmania, that "they had no throwing sticks."

The fact related to me by Mr. Lewis, that the natives of this island used the Womerah; that they knew it by that name, and that he himself saw them using it when Robinson brought in the remnants of the race after the celebrated "black war," about the year 1835, is interesting in more ways than one.

It is interesting to know that it was used by our natives at all, and it is interesting to know that it was known by the same name as it is known by among the Goulburn tribe of natives in Victoria. The latter fact may help us in unravelling the mystery of the origin of our aborigines as a race—other tribes calling the instrument by a different name.

The Womerah used by the Victorian blacks is usually a mere stick, with a hook or projection at one end, which the hollow at the end of the spears used fits on to. The object of the Womerah is to give length to the natural arm, and so gain additional leverage power for casting the spear, which, by its aid, could be thrown more swiftly, and to a greater distance.

I was at first inclined to think that perhaps the natives of Tasmania had been taught the use of the Womerah by the native "Mosquito," who came over from New South Wales to Tasmania in the early days of the Colony; but Mr. Morton tells me that there is no hollow in the end of the spears he has in the Museum, showing that for such spears, at least, a Womerah, similar to that made by the natives of other tribes, had not been used.

This, however, presents no difficulty, as Mr. Lewis tells me that instead of having a hook at the end, the Womerah used by the natives of Tasmania had a projection at one end that was hollowed out, and into which hollow the end of the spear was fixed. Perhaps others who read these notes may be able to throw some light on the subject.