

ON DR. NOETLING'S CONCLUSIONS RESPECT-  
ING THE ABORIGINAL DESIGNATIONS  
FOR STONE IMPLEMENTS.

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(Read October 12th, 1908.)

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Dr. Noetling's conclusions are that—

- (a) There were two classes of stone utensils—one consisting of round, water-worn stones, called *pe-ura*, and used for religious ceremonies; the other of chipped, sharpened stones, called by various names, and used for cutting;
- (b) The Aborigines had perhaps two words, but probably only one, for siliceous implements;
- (c) The Aborigines did not manufacture special implements for special purposes.

The arguments he adduces from the aboriginal vocabulary are so cogent that his conclusions are almost inevitable. It seems to me that only some of the details are arguable, and I shall confine myself to these.

When we investigate the language of the Aborigines we meet at the outset with serious difficulties. In the first place, the records are very meagre, and then, even these were made by men who had no special training in philology. Still, a careful collation of the vocabularies will enable us to arrive at a greater amount of positive knowledge than would at first be suspected.

Subject to correction, I would conclude from my investigation that—

- (a) The number of words in the aboriginal vocabulary is very small—much smaller than the lists drawn up by Calder, Milligan, Ling Roth, and others would lead one to expect;

- (b) Many words, apparently different, are really identical;
- (c) The apparent differences are due to a faculty the Tasmanians seem to have had, in common with the South Sea Islanders—namely, that of interchanging the members of certain sound groups, for instance, the liquids “l,” “m,” “n,” “r;” and, again, the dentals “t” and “n” and “l.”
- (d) The vowels seem to have been particularly subject to variation. Of course, this phenomenon is, like the one just mentioned, also found in the Indo-European languages.

These points are illustrated by the evidence adduced by Dr. Noetling, and we may now proceed to the discussion of his paper.

He states that the aboriginal vocabulary contains no word for knife, axe, saw, bow, arrow, spear-head. I could not find any of these myself, for the word for spear-point—poyeena, poyeenta—bears a remarkable likeness to the English “point”—perhaps, in the former case especially, assimilated to “pe-na,” an aboriginal word, to which we shall refer again.

Still, there are words for “gun” or “musket”—“le rina,” “le langta,” “pawleena” (pawl-lina); but these, when dissected, mean simply “swift weapon,” “long or far-reaching weapon,” “round or powerful weapon.” Indeed, it is these very words that gave me what I think is the clue that will enable us to find a way out of the apparent confusion of the aboriginal vocabulary.

Next, Dr. Noetling discusses the word “trowatta,” which denotes a chipped implement. It consists of two parts—“tro” and “atta.” He offers the conjecture that “tta” is analogous to the “t” in ama-t-us (Lat.), ly-t-os (Gr.), gelieb-t (Ger.), love-d (Eng.), and denotes something finished or made. The abruptly-ending sound of “t” would seem to support this view.

On the other hand, when we examine the vocabulary, we find the “t” or “n” (with the Oceanic epithetic vowel, in practically all the nouns. For instance,

we have *liem-e-na* and *lim-ete* (abscess), *lie-ta* and *ne-na* (sharp), like a knife; thus, "*atta*" may be a mere noun-suffix, though even then it might indicate a state of completion.

This leaves "*tro*" to account for. Dr. Noetling conjectures it to mean rock or stone.

I agree with this, but would go further back—viz., to "hard," as we have "*tera-na*," "*teri-na*" for bone, "*tra-mu-ta*" a pebble, rolled quartz, where "*mu*" is perhaps round, as in "*ma-bea*," to turn round (with verbal suffix "*bea*"). "*Teru-na*," a cutting flint, and "*tro-na*," flint, seem to be forms of the same word. Thus "*trow-atta*" would mean a hard thing finished (by chipping).

In "*mora trona*" (black flint) we have "*mora*," not black, but heavy; thus, the heavy, hard thing.

"*Mungara*" presents some difficulties. It might be a compound of "*muna*" and "*ga-ra*." Now, "*muna*" means wood, fog, therefore, perhaps, dense, solid, and is very near to "*mura*" (heavy). "*Ga-ra*" may have affinity with the second part of "*ponin gale*" (freestone), "*noan yale*" (mudstone), where "*ponin*" may be connected with "*pona*," white (cloud), while we find "*noan*" to be the western equivalent of "*loina*" (stone), or, rather, sharp instrument. "*Gale*" or "*yale*" may be connected with "*ya-na*" (teeth), the natural knives.

We mentioned the cognates "*lie-ta*" and "*ne-na*" as meaning "sharp cutting." The significant part is "*li*" or "*ne*." This we find again in the following words for "stone," mentioned by Dr. Noetling:—"Loi-ne," "le-nni," "na-nni," "noan gale," and we may strengthen the conjecture of the identity of "*li*" and "*ni*" by some analogous cases. We find the following words for "woman"—"*lowa*," "*loa-le*," "*noa-lia*," "*nowa-lia*;" for "bird," "*lae-re-ne*," "*nia-rana*," "*nie-ri-na*;" for "swift," "*lung-a-na*," "*mung-a-na*" (to fly like a bird); "*lang-a-na*," "*lag-a-na*," "*dog-na* (foot); "*nung-a-na*" (boat), for "running thing;" "*lug-a-na*" (river water); "*nug-e-tena* (rain, with double suffix to indicate multitude of drops); "*nug-a-ra*" (drink).

We find "li" or "ni" also in the form "ri. We have "li-e-na," "le-na," "re-na" (kangaroo); "re-na" (water rat); "re-ne" (to run); "li-a" (water); "li" (weapon).

All these meanings are comprised in swift or speedy. An edged stone will be speedier in its work as a tool than a blunt one, and the characteristic of a living animal, a running stream, a boat, a foot, a bird, is motion.

I agree with Dr. Noetling that "loan-tennina," "lenni-parenna," and "leni-carpenny" are words of the same meaning. Analysing them, we find the first parts, "loan," "lenni," and "leni," meaning "stone suitable for sharpening." Stones seem to have had no meaning and no name except in so far as they were found useful. "Tennina" may be akin to "tenine" (a finger or toenail), "something that scratches." "Parenna" seems to be a form of "pe-re-na," where "pe" would mean "pointed, sharp," as in "pe-na" (a lance or spear), and "re" would be "cutting." "Carpenny" may be composed of "kaw" (teeth), "pe" (sharp), and the suffix "ny" or "ne."

The round stone, presumed to have been used for religious ceremonies, was called "pe-ura." The explanation of this word is specially difficult, as we do not know the exact pronunciation of it. If the "r" is harshly trilled—as it evidently was when the recorders wrote the same word as "prena" and "perina," "trona" and "teruna"—it is quite possible that "peura" was but another form of "palla" (round), as we find it in "pala" (sun, star), "pala" (man), "pula-tula" (eye), "pul-bena" (frog), perhaps a bull-frog, "poira" (round shell). This presents a suggestive analogy with "ball," "bull-et," "bowl," "bill-et," "pill," "barrel," "pear," "berry," "apple," "malum."

Another conjecture is that "peura" is a form of "pe-una," where "pe" would have the meaning of to hurt from "pena" (spear), and "una" means fire. In support of this we have "mungara puna" (scar), such as would be caused by wounds inflicted during religious ceremonies, and cauterised to preserve the marks, and at the same time prevent mortification. Of conjectures there is no end, but there is at any rate a beginning:

and in the dissection of the aboriginal words and the collation of their parts, a scientific process is begun which may lead to more satisfactory results than are attainable to-day. Conjectures there must be, for we cannot seek unless we know what we hope to find.

In conclusion, I desire to lay stress on the fact that the available records are in a very unsystematic form. As a curious illustration, I would mention the translation of the first chapter of Genesis, attributed to Mr. Thos. Wilkinson. Ling Roth's book gives a very different rendering from that contained in the J. B. Walker Memorial volume, although G. W. Walker's MS. Journal is quoted; and, again, even that quotation is different from its counterpart in the Memorial volume.

Further, not only does Ling Roth mention some records which have apparently disappeared—viz., those of Wilkinson and Sterling—but it is quite probable that other manuscripts exist which are of no other than sentimental value to the present possessors, and would no doubt be obtainable for transcription. If the Royal Society were to make a public appeal for the gift or loan of such records, some valuable material might be saved from oblivion.

I would finally mention that I have heard that there exist some phonographic records of the actual aboriginal speech; if these could be found, they would be of the greatest value. As far as I am able to advance the study of that speech I shall do my utmost, and feel confident that the Royal Society will encourage my efforts.