

JANUARY 2nd, 1907.

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES.

LECTURE BY DR. KLATSCH.

A large audience assembled on January 2, 1907, in the Royal Society's room at the Tasmanian Museum to hear a lecture by Dr. Herman Klatsch, Professor of Human Anatomy at the University of Heidelberg, on the habits, customs, and ceremonies of the Australian natives. Mr. A. G. Webster presided, and amongst those present was Dr. Delany, Bishop of Laranda.

At the outset Dr. Klatsch explained the object of his visit to Australia, namely, to study the skulls of the aborigines, which Huxley had declared bore a striking resemblance to fossil skulls found in Europe. Huxley's assertion had, the Professor said, been absolutely confirmed by his investigations. In addition to studying the skulls of the natives, he had sought to study their bodies generally, and for that purpose had measured some three hundred of them in various parts of Australia. He came to Australia in 1904, and first settled in Brisbane, where he made the acquaintance of Dr. Roth, who placed his great collection of skulls at his disposal. In making his investigations he had also received great assistance from the Governments of New South Wales and Queensland. The Government of the latter State had furnished him with a vessel in which he had circumnavigated Australia, and also made a trip to Java.

The Professor then proceeded to speak at some length on the results of his examination of the aboriginal skulls, and pointed out in the diagrams projected on a screen the remarkable prominence about the eyes, which was a point of resemblance to the fossil skulls of the earliest period found in Europe. He then directed the attention of the audience to reproductions of photographs of natives taken in various parts of the continent. The first group shown was one of Archer River natives, whom he described as fine athletically-built men, and very intelligent. He found them, he said, good material for investigation, but encountered great difficulties at the outset. He succeeded, however, in winning their confidence by performing an operation on an old woman, and thenceforward all was plain sailing. The missionaries living amongst the people appeared to the professor to have anything but a pleasant time of it, and he wondered very much how they continued to live there. After alluding to the fact that polished stone implements were rarely found in that particular part of

Australia, the Professor described the danger which he incurred in digging open a grave in order to obtain a skeleton. The blacks threatened to spear him; and to quote the professor's own words: "I left the place very quickly one day, and since then I have been more careful whenever I have opened a grave." The people in that part of Queensland were dying out rapidly. They lived very frequently with Chinese, who introduced opium among them, with fatal effects. The introduction of the drug was prohibited by law, but the law went for nothing. The missionaries did their best for the unfortunate people, but had not received the assistance they deserved. The natives inhabiting the region in the vicinity of the Bellender Ker Mountains were of a superior type. They were intelligent enough, and assisted the whites in gold-mining. It was quite erroneous, the Professor declared, to think them incapable of working. The facial characteristics of those people strongly resembled those of the peoples of the Northern Territory, and of N.W. Australia; a fact which, to his mind, indicated that they had all sprung from the same primitive stock. In this district Professor Klatsch was successful in obtaining possession of a mummified corpse, and the means to which he had recourse constituted a quaint piece of comedy. He went to interview the relatives of the departed with his pockets full of tobacco, etc., and made an offer for the mummy. The weed appealed to the young members of the family, but the mother strongly objected to the whole proceeding. However, material prevailed over sentimental considerations, and the professor obtained possession of the mummy. But even then he was not out of the wood, for next day the young people, instigated by the importunate mother, demanded the return of the body. It was then the professor's turn; he demanded the refund of the tobacco, and before anything further eventuated, left the district.

Leaving Queensland, the Professor continued his investigations in West Australia, visiting Broome and Wyndham. The latter place was rather notorious, and unfavourably so, on account of the blacks in that district having been ill-treated by the whites. In the words of the Professor, Wyndham was in the stage in which Tasmania was between 1820 and 1830. A black war was going on there; where there was an enormous number of blacks, and in consequence of the trouble with the whites, it was impossible to approach them. They regarded every white man, if a little better dressed than usual, as a policeman, and to them a

policeman was a dangerous animal. They made a distinction between a policeman and an ordinary white man.

The Port Darwin natives were next the subject of the Professor's observations. It would, he said, be a great pity to allow them to die out. They were able to work, and of them it could be safely said that they had a future. He concluded his very interesting account of his experiences by describing his visit to Melville Island.

Mr. Alex. Morton, after alluding to some of the Professor's theories, said that it was quite possible that he would return to Hobart again, and deliver his lecture in a more popular form to a

mixed audience, and also to school children.

Dr. Delany moved a vote of thanks to the lecturer. There were two points on which Dr. Klatsch had borne strong testimony; one was the ill-treatment of the natives by the whites; the other was the admirable work done amongst the blacks by the missionaries of all denominations.

The vote of thanks was carried by acclamation.

Dr. Klatsch, in returning thanks, said his reason for desiring to deliver a popular lecture was that he was convinced that the ill-treatment of the natives was in the main the outcome of ignorance.

