

# The Hereafter

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First published as part the article titled 'Folklore of the Australian Aborigines', *Science of Man*, vol. 1 (new series), 1898, pp. 142-43.

About three-quarters of a mile north-westerly from the Coolangatta homestead, the residence of the late Mr. Alexander Berry, is a remarkable rock on the eastern side of the Coolangatta mountain. This rock slopes easterly with an angle of about 30 degrees from the horizon, and on its face are six elongated depressions, caused by the weathering away of the softer portions of the stone. These places are suggestive of having been worn by the feet of many persons having used them, like the depressions worn in pavements by much traffic. This has given rise to a superstition among the aborigines that these marks were made in the rock by the feet of the spirits of many generations of natives sliding from the upper to the lower side of it. This belief is strengthened by the fact that the first two depressions are larger than the rest; the next pair on the left of them are somewhat smaller; and the last pair, farther to the left are smaller still. The aboriginal legend is that the larger marks were made by the feet of the men; the medium size by the women, and the smaller by the children. One of the old blackfellows, who was with me when I visited this place, stated that always after a death in the camp, this rock presented the appearance of having been recently used. If the deceased was a man, the large marks looked fresh; if a woman, the middle pair; and if a child, the smaller slides showed indications of someone having slipped along them.

It was from this rock that the shade of the native took its final departure from its present hunting grounds, and this was accomplished in the following manner: A very long stem of a cabbage-tree, imperceptible to human vision, reached from some unknown land across the sea to this rock. When a blackfellow died, his soul went in the night to the top of the rock, and, standing there for a few moments, looked out towards the sea, which is about two miles distant. Then he slid down the hollow grooves, one foot resting in each, and when he got to the lower side of the rock he could distinguish the end of the long pole, on to which he jumped, and walked away along it to the sea-coast, and onward across the expanse of water. The pole continued over the sea, and in following it along the traveller came to a place where flames of fire seemed to rise out of a depression in the water. If he had been a good tribesman he would be able to pass through the flames unscathed; but if he had been a bad man, who had broken the tribal laws, he might get scorched and fall into the sea, or perhaps he would get through it more or less singed.

After a while the end of the pole was reached at the other side of the sea. The traveller then continued on along a track through the bush, and after a time met a crow, who said: 'You once frightened me,' and thereupon threw a spear at him, but missed him, and the man kept on his way, the crow calling him bad names, and making a great noise. At another place he came to where a large native fig-tree was growing, and two men were there. One of these men was standing on the ground, and was some relative of the traveller; but the other man, who was up in the tree, was a vindictive person, and would kill him if he got the chance. He asks the traveller's friend to bring him under the tree, but in doing so the friend warns him to take care. The enemy up the fig-tree is gathering figs, and is squeezing them together around a quartz crystal, which has the effect of causing the lumps of figs to increase in size and weight. He then calls out to the traveller to stand out on a clear space, so that he can throw him the bundle of fruit. The pilgrim, however, suspects his evil intentions, and refuses to do this, but walks into a scrubby place under the tree, and being hungry, stoops down to pick up some of the figs which have fallen to the ground, having been shaken off by the wind. The enemy in the tree then throws the bundle of figs at him, which by this time has changed into a large stone, but he misses his mark, owing to the scrub and undergrowth obstructing his view.

The traveller now resumed his journey, and the track along which he was going passed through a narrow, rocky gorge, with scrub growing on either side, in which were some king parrots of gigantic size, who tried to bite him with their strong beaks, but he defended himself with his shield, and succeeded in getting through the pass. Upon this the parrots set up a great chattering, similar to that made by these birds in their haunts.

On proceeding farther he comes to a forest where there are plenty of trees but no under-scrub, and the grass is green. There are plenty of kangaroos and other native animals of various kinds. Presently he reaches a place where there are large numbers of black people of all ages, amongst whom are some young men playing ball in a clear place near the camp. There the traveller sees his relatives and all his friends who have died before him. He sits down a little way from the people, and when his relations see him, and conduct him into the camp, where they paint and dress him in the same way that he was accustomed to ornament his person in his own country. After that, great shouting and corroboreeing is indulged in, and he plays amongst the rest.

Presently, an old, dirty-looking blackfellow, with sores upon his body, comes near and calls out, 'Who came when that noise was made just now?' They answer him that it was only the young people playing about. This ugly old man cannot come into the camp because there is a watercourse dividing the boundary of his hunting grounds, beyond which he dare not pass. If he were to see the new arrival he might point a bone at him, or work him some other injury, by means

of sorcery. This is why the people give him an evasive answer, on receiving which he returns to his own camp, which is a little distance farther on.

If the person who died had been greedy or quarrelsome, or had always been causing trouble in the tribe, he would meet with a different reception at the end of the journey. In order to describe this, it will be necessary to take the reader back to that part of the story where the crow threw the spear. If the traveller has been a troublesome fellow, the spear pierces him and the crow comes and picks mouthfuls of flesh out of him, and knocks him about; after which he pulls out the spear and starts the man on his journey again. When he reaches the place where the large fig-tree is growing, there is no friend there to warn him of danger, so he walks carelessly under the tree, and commences to pick up and eat the ripe figs which have fallen to the ground. The enemy up in the tree watches his opportunity, and throws the bundles of figs, which he has changed to stone by his jugglery, down upon the traveller, bruising him severely and stretching him almost lifeless on the ground. The man then comes down out of the tree, and shakes the traveller, and stands him on his feet and starts him on his way, bruised and bleeding from his wounds, and scarcely able to walk. When at last he reaches the forest of green trees and the camp of his countrymen, the people shout out to him that they don't want him there, and make signs to him to go on. The scabby old blackfellow before referred to then makes his appearance, and asks the usual question: 'Who came when that noise was made?' The people answer him that a stranger came; whereupon, the old man calls the traveller to him, and takes him away to this own camp. The wounds made by those clever, old wizards, the crow and the man in the fig-tree, never heal properly, and give the injured man a scabby and dirty appearance ever afterwards.

[As previously stated, the specimens of aboriginal folklore which I have placed before the readers of this journal are only a few out of a large number copied into my note books on this highly interesting subject during many years residence in the back country. I cannot conclude this article without expressing my appreciation of the labours of Mrs. K. L. Parker, who has recently written a small volume on 'Australian Legendary Tales' for the collection and publication of which she deserves the thanks of all who are interested in the folklore of the Australian aborigines.]