

# The Aboriginal History Project Newspaper Archive

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## FAIR PLAY FOR THE ABORIGINES

"WORTH PRESERVING"

### U.S. Scientist's Plea For Sympathy

**D**R. D. S. DAVIDSON, Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Pennsylvania (U.S.A.), who is in Australia studying the aborigines on behalf of the Social Science Research Council of New York, said today that the attitude of many Australians toward the black lacked sympathy and understanding.

While there was yet time an intensive study of the aboriginal tribes should be made. In ten years, he said, investigation of their customs and beliefs would be very difficult, because of contact of the remnants with the whites.

Tasmanians are now keenly interested in the relics of the extinct native race, although while the race survived it was generally treated with contempt.

Dr. Davidson admires the black-fellow of the wilds, who, he says, is particularly well equipped for the life he leads and is master of his environment. Whatever the condition of the country he is able to obtain food and shelter. He is highly intelligent in all matters affecting his daily life.

As a hunter and tracker he is unrivalled. For the chase he has abundant energy and resource, and it is only in matters that appear to him to be useless and a waste of time that he appears to the whites to be stupid.

#### ISOLATED FROM IDEAS

Why then, Dr. Davidson was asked (and it is a question he has frequently heard in Australia, which he has covered from north to south) did not the aborigines achieve a higher form of civilisation, grow cereal crops and live in settled communities?

While not dogmatic, Dr. Davidson pointed out that the aborigines were an isolated race of Stone Age men who had not the advantage of receiving ideas from neighboring regions. Western Europe learned from Asia and Africa. No people had ever accomplished much by their own efforts. Every people had borrowed ideas and by regrouping and thus



DR. DAVIDSON

hem in their special circumstances had advanced.

It might be that the aborigines had tried agriculture and settled living, but had gone back to the nomadic life of the hunter. They had not to their hand cereal plants that could be improved nor animals that could be domesticated.

#### HARMONIOUS SOCIAL SYSTEM

But they had survived, and had worked out a social system, complex in detail, yet understood and implicitly followed by them. It worked harmoniously, which could not be said of our own social systems.

Among the aborigines there was practically no crime. They had a minute percentage of maladjustments. Their men got on well together, whereas, if we had not our police, half of us would be shot down by the other half.

In an aboriginal tribe, no one was outside the pale of kinship, but was regarded and termed as if he were a brother. The black's customs and beliefs were interwoven with the tribal structure, and his gods were the mythological founders of the tribe, who controlled sun, moon, and stars, and the forces of Nature.

To shake the black's faith in one of his customs or beliefs brought his whole world of thought in a wreck about him. It was terribly hard for him to understand the missionary, and impossible to understand two missionaries, each preaching a different doctrine.

#### EFFECT OF HEREDITY

It should be understood that the black's social system and simple beliefs were all-sufficient to him. He craved nothing more. To give him more, except gradually and convincingly, confused and depressed him. He could not be made a child of European civilisation in a generation.

In the eastern States of America were remnants of the Indians who first came into contact with the whites 300 years ago. They felt themselves to be Indian, and were, for the most part, full-blooded, yet their farmsteads were much the same as those of their white neighbors. They spoke like the whites and thought like the whites. In everything except color they were ordinary American citizens, driving round in their cars and allowing their children to attend jazz parties.

But it had taken 300 years for this transformation of the wild Redskin from one harmonious unit into another on a totally different plane. The Australian aborigine had to start from further back than the Red Indian. How ridiculous was it, therefore, to suppose that in a few years the tremendous pull of heredity could be reversed.

The Australian aborigine might perish in the transition stage. If he did not there was nothing in him to suggest that in time he would not achieve civilisation as we know it and be distinguished in nothing but color from the British population.