

Letter from Isabella Park Dawson, 1870

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THE LANGUAGE OF THE ABORIGINES.  
TO THE EDITOR OF THE AUSTRALASIAN.

Sir,- I request the favour of space in *The Australasian* to record information about the aborigines of the Western district of Victoria, which I acquired during many years of intimacy with the remnants of tribes occupying the country between the Hopkins River and Portland. My father's station having always been a favourite place of resort for the blacks, and as several of them with their families were generally employed to do work, I had from my infancy better opportunities of acquiring their language and learning their manners and customs than perhaps any other person in the Western District. Such very favourable circumstances having placed me in a position to assist in preserving a knowledge of the aborigines, were I to neglect doing so I should consider myself not only guilty of gross negligence, but of ingratitude to a race of nature's nobility for which I have the greatest affection and respect.

People seeing only the miserable remnants of the aborigines to be met with about public-houses, may be inclined to sneer at my expressions, but let them come into social communication with them in the bush, away from the means of intoxication, and listen to their artless and innocent conversations, their fun and wit, and they will, nay must, agree with me that they compare most favourably with many peoples calling themselves civilised. It may astonish those who are given to consider the aborigines as a race scarcely human, to be informed that their general intelligence, common sense, and shrewdness, are quite equal, if not superior, to that of the poorest classes in Great Britain. During the many years I had the most favourable opportunities of studying their nature, I never observed anything dishonest in their conduct or repulsive in their habits and conversations ; neither did I observe in their native tongue what may be termed low language, excepting the three instances in the list of "vindictive epithets;" but even these solitary cases of idle words would not in our polite society be considered much out of place. What they may have learnt to express in English I do not excuse, excepting on the grounds that they have been taught by a race which assumes a position as far above the poor natives as its practice in many things is beneath them. Consideration for space in *The Australasian*, prevents further remarks on this interesting subject, and I beg to subscribe myself yours very respectfully.

ISABELLA PARK DAWSON. March 14.

In placing the following before your readers, the writer begs them to understand that, although the orthography is questionable, it is the nearest to convey sounds of many native words almost inexpressible.

Note.-When the letter *k* forms the commencement of a word with a consonant following, the *k* is not sounded, as in *knee*.

### **HUMAN BEINGS AND MEMBERS OF THE BODY.**

White man-K'nauma'teitch.

White woman-K'nauma'teitchar.

Aboriginal man-Marr.

Head-Beem, a general name for all heads.

Hair-Arrat.

Forehead-Mittinch.

Ear-Wirng.

Eye-Mirng.

Eyelash-Knarrat-mirng.

Nose-Kapoong.

Lip-Woorong.

Teeth-Tung-ang.

Tongue-Talling.

Mouth-Oolang.

Throat-Yan (which means to pass or go, a person leaving;  
yannan, gone; yannakie, must go).

Neck-Allum.

Shoulder-Kok.

Chest-Mart.

Waist-Aloork.

Navel-Pe-koorn.

Stomach-Tookooie.

Spine or Back-Aw-oorn.

Leg-Pirn.

Knee-Parring.

Foot-Toomang.

Hand-Wookartang, the giver to me.

### **RELATIONS.**

Grandfather-Kna'poorn.

Grandmother-Koorooky'e.

Father-Peepye.

Mother-Kneerang.

Brother-Wardii.

Sister-Kakii.

Cousin -Tow-will.

Uncle-Mee-min.

Aunt-Leebye.

Wife-Mullungar

Brother-in-law-Biningar.

Child-Tookooie.

Orphan-Kokaitch.

Old Woman-Kookoo, witch.

## **ANIMALS.**

Cattle-Wooromkilwerrang (from wooromkil, very long; and werrang, horns).  
Horses-Gump gump.  
Pigs-Toornmerring (from toorn, to turn; and merring, ground).  
Sheep- Tachmerring, feeding on the ground.  
Kangaroo (male)-Koorine.  
Kangaroo (female)-Marrim.  
Brush kangaroo-Kallarn.  
Wallaby-Peerie.  
Kangaroo Rat-Paroosh.  
Bandicoot-Waroon.  
Common opossum-Kooramook.  
Ring-tail opossum-Weearn (its cry).  
Water rat-Moorong.  
Mouse-Baroot.  
Bat-Hinnyhinitch ; also the native name of an orclis, which resembles a bat's face.  
Squirrel-Weesh, weesh (its cry).  
Small squirrel-Too'an.  
Native cat-Kapoong.  
Porcupine-Willing-allik.  
Native bear-Wirngill.  
Dog-Gall.  
Wild dog-Burnang.  
Wombat-Meeam.  
Platypus-Aller'till.  
Tortoise-Toorn-gill (turn mud).

## **BIRDS.**

Emu-Kapring or Barring'mall.  
Native companion-Kooron.  
Black swan-Koonawarn.  
Large heron-Kallawar.  
Little heron-Kookup.  
Cormorant-Wallongkarn.  
Bustard (wild turkey)-Barrim barrim.  
Pelican-Kart-perap.  
Wild goose-Boodergill.  
Musk duck-Booriebar.  
Mountain duck-Koorae-koorae (its cry).  
Teal-Peernier.  
Little grebe- Kooramkooramitt.  
Kingfisher- Banbankoonamill.  
Snipe-Tirmgall.  
Owl-Tooney toonitch.  
Black magpie-Gillin gillin (its cry ).  
Common magpie-Koorie.  
Plover or lapwing-Peteret (its cry) .  
Soldier bird or minah-Pootch.  
Wattle bird-Kannak woorot (peck at the tree).  
Cockatoo-l'youk.

Yang Yang parrot-Merran.  
Black cockatoo-Willan.  
Rose-bill parroquet-Kootch-kootch.  
Blue Mountain parroquet-Kallang'high.  
Small green parroquet-Yoo'kootch.  
Lorry (common) parroquet-Yoo'rakootch.  
Pigeon-Kooray.  
Crow-Waugh (cry).  
Laughing-jackass-Koonett.  
Swallow-Wee-which (cry).

### **LIZARDS.**

Guana-Wirrakoot.  
Lizard (common)-Moonie.

### **SNAKES.**

General name-Koo'rang  
Black snake-Moo'rang.  
Whipsnake-Kir'toosh.

### **FISHES.**

Whale-Counter'bool.  
Shark-Toorong.  
Sting-ray-Mardan. When an object is hit  
By spear or weapon, the blacks exclaim  
"Mardan" in reference to the blow in-  
fllicted by the serrated spike under the tail  
of the sting-ray.  
Blackfish (in fresh water)-Yerrie-char.  
Trout-Yoo'nim.  
Eel-Koo-yang.  
Small fishes resembling whitebait, and only  
eaten by women and children-Toort-court.

### **INSECTS.**

Common small black ant-Rae-chook.  
Bull-dog ant-Koo'mall.  
Jumpinig black ant-Pirk-Pirk, jump jump.  
Sugar ant (large)-Toolorngore.  
Flies -Menning.  
Blow fly-Wooron.  
March fly-Morrol.

### **CRUSTACEA.**

Crawfish-Yarram.  
Cuttle fish-Karrat-marrang, many fingers.  
Shrimp-Yapeach, also Wee'hank.  
Mutton fish-Mungir.  
Clan shell fish-Yoo'yook.  
Peri winkle-Kammat.

## **VEGETATION.**

Trees generally-Woorot.  
Blackwood or lightwood-Moo'tang.  
Common gum tree-Woorot.  
Red gum tree-Pe-ank.  
The oak tree-Erring.  
Box tree-Karrank.  
Cherry tree-Ballat.  
Wattle tree- Karrang.  
Honey suckle tree-Wee'reitch.  
Fern tree-Woorntantoolook (woom means high).  
Grass tree-Buck-up.  
Fern-Ma'keitch.  
Reeds -Wooloot.  
Grass -Moul-mool.  
Leaves-Terrang.  
Bark-Tallank.  
Seaweed-Pee-koy.

## **NUMERALS .**

One-Kyapa-eek.  
Two-Pooleitcha.  
Three-Ballink-meeah.  
Four-Woort-ba-derang.  
Five-Ba-roong.  
Six, seven, eight, and nine have no names, and are represented by the fingers. Ten is Woort-ba woort-ba derang. Eleven Woort-ba woort-ba derang and one finger held out. Twelve by the same words and two fingers, and so on to twenty, which is expressed by woort-ba woort-ba derang and outspread hands. Thirty by these words and outspread hands held up twice. Little idea appears to exist of stating exact numbers beyond that. Multitudes are expressed by holding up the outspread hands, and repeatedly opening and shutting them.

## **NAMES OF PLACES.**

Mountains, generally-Kar'nk.  
Mount Elephant-Terring Allap.  
Mount Shadwell-Bok.  
Hill near Camperdown-Link'oorat.  
Mount Rouse-Kolor.  
Mount Eels-Pootch-beem, meaning high head.  
Mount Napier-Taw' Pook.  
Niel Black's Hill-K'noorat.  
Mr. Thomson's Lake-Killebbeet.  
Tower Hill-Koroit (indicating volcanic activity).

Tower Hill Lake-Mirtch-hile.  
 Mount Warrnambool-Talla-terrang.  
 Hill near Warrnambool-Yooyook. The  
     name of a bird frequenting the locality.  
 Mount Taurus-Wirn-wim.  
 Point of land on which Belfast is built-  
     Poo-yoop-gill; the g in gill sounded hard.  
 Island at Port Fairy-Yolook or (Ethith.  
 Waterhole near-Burrel's Flat-Boodabool.  
 Rise on which Yangary house is built-Baa-  
     wheetch-moorn (meaning hot or burning  
     ground, and indicating volcanic action at  
     some former period).  
 Creek near Yangery-Yangery.  
 Hopkins River-Allo-bank.  
 Merri River-Merri.  
 Dunmore home station-Koonang Gall (camp-  
     ing ground of wild dogs).  
 Hummocks at Armstrong's Bay, between  
     Warrnambool and Port Fairy-Toowool.  
 Large Swamp between Merrang and Minjah  
     Stations -Yan-yeem. (Query-Yan Yean  
     reservoir, water supply of Melbourne.)

#### **NAMES OF THINGS AND WORDS.**

Fire-Ween.  
 Lightning-Yarone.  
 Thunder-Mordan, meaning noise.  
 Rain-My'ang.  
 Wind-Oorndoonk.  
 Sea-Meirtick.  
 Sky-Moornong.  
 Sun-Tirng.  
 Moon-Koorntarrong.  
 Stars-Kackii-tirng, sisters of the sun.  
 The ground-Merring.  
 Sea sand-Kolak.  
 Stones- Merri.  
 Wood-Ween.  
 Log-Yoorak.  
 Water- Pareetch.  
 Waterhole-Killink. Sound produced by  
     stone plunged into waterhole-Kallunk.  
 House-Bard-ba-moorndook, meaning habi-  
     tation erected by blows.  
 Knife-Marnboot, marnboot mattal, cut cut  
     meat.  
 Dray-Barrangourt.  
 Axe or tomahawk-Bartbartkoort.  
 Opossum rug-Baloonge.  
 Blanket-Kn'oolarr.

Opossum-skin ornaments worn round the loins at corrobories- Barrintch.  
Kangaroo teeth necklace-Marnmar.  
Boot-Wallo-walloup-dinang.  
Hat-Kn'ooparbim.  
Hair net-Koorair Beem (net for head).  
Ornament of emeu {Sic.} feathers worn round the loins while dancing-Teerbarrim.  
Basket-Bungar.  
Eel basket-Narraban.  
Bucket-Popair.  
Bone-Backie.  
Stump-Tooloocoat.  
Fence-Nallopbun.  
Yes-Ko.  
No-K'ne k'ne.  
Dead-Kalpera'n.

### **WEAPONS.**

Shield-Malkar.  
Liangle-Mar'whang.  
Waddy-War'whar.  
Spear (generally).-Tirr.  
Heavy long-barbed spear-Toolawar.  
Light reed spear-Tark.  
Spear-thrower-Merriwon.  
Stone axe-Mootchair.  
Boomerang-Lady-laidim.  
Long pole carried by the lubras.-K-annak.

### **SUPERNATURAL.**

In investigating this subject, every care has been taken to exclude all notions and ideas the natives may have acquired in their intercourse with white people. The following was the belief entertained previous to the introduction of Christianity amongst them, and is so still :-

God.-Pring-gee-all (the gee sounded hard) is believed to be a man of great size, living above the clouds, of very good disposition, and never unkind to anyone.

Devil.-Mooroop or Nitt. Mooroop is a gigantic ugly man, frequenting scrubs, and capable of flitting from place to place with the rapidity of lightning. He is very mischievous, always hungry, and has a great craving for human flesh, particularly that of children. At night "yammering bairns" are instantly hushed, and bury themselves under the 'possum rugs when

some old dame calls out "Ka-ka-Mooroop," "Come here, devil." The natives are intensely terrified by Mooroop at night, and believe he sends the owl or morepork to watch and give warning, when he may pounce upon an unfortunate straggler from the camp or mi-mi. Hence their hatred of the owl, as a bird of evil omen.

### **RELIGIOUS BELIEF.**

They have no idea of futurity, or of rewards and punishments after death. A belief is said to exist that they will return white; but apparently this, as well as many other absurdities attributed to them, has been impressed upon them by Europeans. The writer never heard them expressing their sentiments otherwise than that when dead they are eternally extinguished.

### **VINDICTIVE EPITHETS, THE ONLY APPROACH TO SWEARING.**

You wretch of a bandycoot-Warrondeitch waroon waroon.

You with a projecting mouth-Bachootch oolang.

You with the squint eye-Shoo-mirng.

### **EXCLAMATIONS.**

Wah !-Astonishment.

Yaki-Fear, or Oh dear, when hurt.

Ki-ki-something like, "goodness me."

Woo-woork-an-Good-bye, meaning poor, poor thing.

### **GRAMMAR.**

The words *a*, *an*, *the*, *this*, and *that*, are translated by the word "dean." There are very few verbs, and these are not modified in any way. The only words resembling our personal pronouns are these - Natook, knoo-took, and k'indook, meaning I, you, and they.

### **CONSTRUCTION OF SENTENCES.**

English idiom-Where are you going?

Aboriginal idiom-where going you?

Translation- Woondia-yah k'ning k'nindook.

English idiom-Kindle this fire.

Aboriginal idiom-Make this fire.

Translation- Mooyoobackie dean ween.



English idiom-Make a mi-mi.  
Aboriginal idiom-make this mimi.  
Translation- Mooyoobackie dean wonrn.

English idiom-Come and sit down here.  
Aboriginal idiom-Come here, sit down in this place.  
Translation- Kaka koopakee dean bah.

English idiom-Who killed this blackfellow?  
Aboriginal idiom-Who killed this black-fellow?  
Translation- K'narra bardbarn dean Mar?

English idiom-How many children have you?  
Aboriginal idiom-How many child-ren?  
Translation-Kn'aw meeah tookie?

English idiom-Look at this large tree.  
Aboriginal idiom-Look at this large tree.  
Translation – Nakakee dean mee-har roong woorot.

English idiom-I am very hungry.  
Aboriginal idiom-I am very hungry.  
Translation- Natook bardbarn n'eulang,

English idiom-Come, and we will go to the water hole.  
Aboriginal idiom-Come go lot of us over there waterhole.  
Translation- Ka ka yana bin mookee killin.

English idiom-Will you die?  
Aboriginal idiom-Dying will you?  
Translation- Kalperang ing?

#### **WORDS OF A SONG**

Barnmitt barnmitt tung-ang koorooketch.  
Barnmitt barnmitt tung-ang koorooketch.  
Ba'roong tookooenoong.  
Yah wirng kah wirng ab.  
Yau kaloom ee Nitt.

#### **TRANSLATION, OR MEANING.**

Evil spirit evil spirit come and eat orphans.  
Evil spirit evil spirit come and eat orphans.  
Many many children.  
Hark to me many many children.  
The Devil will take you into a dark scrub.