

The Ingenious Australian Boomerang

(Continued from page seven)

tralia, refers to the boomerang thus: "All of them (the Botany Bay, New South Wales, natives) were armed with long pikes (spears), and a wooden weapon shaped like a scimitar (the short curved sword affected by the Turks)."

The natives are particularly careful in the choice of wood from which they fashion boomerangs. They see to it that the grain of the wood follows the contour of the weapon, that it possesses a flat, and also a convex side, and that it has the necessary degree of curvature. The maximum forward distance that the returning boomerang can be thrown, is given by Mr. Thorpe as about one hundred and fifty yards. The returning boomerang is as typically Australian, as are the Kangaroo and the Emu. No other race, outside Australia, ever used this particular variety of weapon, although a curved throwing-stick was employed by the primitive inhabitants of ancient Egypt, for bringing down water-fowl, and a so-called boomerang is still in use among the aboriginal people of India.

There is a great deal of misconception, even among Australians, regarding the use of the boomerang. Most people believe that all boomerangs will return to their starting-point, when skillfully thrown. Although all boomerangs are more or less curved, the heavy war boomerangs, used in tribal fights and for hunting among some tribes, are not designed to come back to the hand of the thrower. They are much larger than the come-back variety, and like these, have one flat and one curved surface. Owing to their shape, their flight through the air is not in a straight line, like that of a spear, and for this reason an enemy finds them difficult to dodge.

In his leisure moments, the native of the Far North, is fond of carrying ornate designs on his war boomerangs. The execution of some of these

carvings, displays a high degree of skill.

With the exception of boomerangs used only on ceremonial occasions, the flat side is never carved, as to do so might interfere with the flight of the weapon. Frequently they are fantastically painted with different colored pigments, and ornamented with feathers. But this is only the case when some big tribal gathering is in progress.

One authority declares that the boomerang which returns to the hand that throws it, is not used in war. He says it is purely a weapon of the chase, and is only effective against flocks of birds when flying.

The method of using it is interesting. A lagoon is selected, upon which a thousand or more ducks may be peacefully resting. One, or maybe half a dozen natives, approach it stealthily. When close to the edge of the water they rush forward, shouting and yelling, and at the same

time, a boomerang is hurled as though aimed almost directly at the birds. For some distance it skims along the surface of the water, and the startled ducks, believing they are surrounded by enemies, have no option but to rise straight up in the air.

As though it were endowed with some devilish instinct, the boomerang also rises in swirling spiral contortions, tearing in and out among the terrified birds, which, possibly, with the idea that there is safety in numbers, keep close together, while the weapon does its deadly work. A single boomerang will sometimes bring down a dozen or more birds. Much the same procedure is followed when cockatoos or galah (parrots) are the game sought, except that the birds flock from the tree-tops, instead of from the water.

To attempt to bring down large game, such as kangaroos, wallabies, and emus with a come-back boomerang, would be as futile as going

elephant-hunting with a pop-gun, and is never attempted by the Australian native.

A tremendous amount of nonsense has been written about the extraordinary skill, with which the aboriginal handles this variety of boomerang. It has been stated that a skilled thrower will hurl a boomerang and make it return and break a bottle at his feet. Anyone backing the bottle, would be a winner every time. The bottle backer would have to fear merely the million to one chance.

Given favorable conditions, a good thrower can make his boomerang return close to the spot from which he threw it.

The manner in which the idea of a weapon, such as the boomerang, came to a race so low down in the scale of humanity as the Australian aboriginal, has long puzzled investigators. Some believe it was accidental, while others hold the view that it was suggested by the spiral course a gun-leaf follows, when falling to the ground.

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