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ABORIGINAL–EUROPEAN RELATIONS

IN

NORTH QUEENSLAND, 1861–1897

by

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PART III

ABORIGINAL-EUROPEAN RELATIONS

IN THE

PACIFIED AREAS
CHAPTER 9

ABORIGINAL-EUROPEAN RELATIONS IN THE PACIFIED AREAS, 1869-1897:

THE DOOMED RACE - THEORY AND PRACTICE

The acceptance of the idea that the Aborigines were a doomed race predated Queensland's separation and there was nothing in North Queensland's experience to cast doubt upon the theory's validity. Obvious factors such as frontier violence, disease, alcoholism, addiction to opium, and infanticide were recognized as was the fact that the ratio of deaths to births was three to one in the pacified areas. But these did not explain adequately the rapidity of the extinction in the south nor that imminent in the north. The colonists believed there was a mysterious factor present, even a law of nature, which rendered all efforts to help Aborigines, or other conquered indigenous peoples, ultimately vain. Thus Queensland's most prominent authority on Aboriginal life, Archibald Meston, philosophized after observing a group of uncontaminated rainforest Aborigines:

The Australian blacks are moving rapidly on into the eternal darkness into which all savage and inferior races are surely destined to disappear. All effort to preserve them, though creditable to our humanity, is a poor compliment to our knowledge of those inexorable laws whose operation are as apparent as our own existence. Their epoch of time is near its termination, the shadows deepening towards the everlasting night.

1. See Table VI.
2. 'Minutes of Evidence', 1861 V. & P., pp. 10, 11, 18, 42, 44; Truth, 7 May 1899; Bertie Newspaper Cuttings, no. 76, (N.L.); C.C., 2 December 1876.
Indeed, the Queensland Commissioner to the 1876 Californian Centennial indicated the certainty with which the doomed race theory was accepted when he informed his American audience that one of Queensland’s assets was that there were only a few thousand Aborigines who were 'dying off fast'.

In this chapter it is proposed to examine the facts of the doomed race theory. In most areas of North Queensland depopulation resulting from frontier warfare, the ravages of disease, the use of alcohol and opium, infanticide, infertility, and the changed physical and social environment changed the nature of the challenge adaptation posed to the Aborigines. It also changed the nature of the challenge Aboriginal society posed to the conquerors. It is intended to analyse the effect that the physical destruction of traditional Aboriginal society had on the attitudes and actions of the colonists. More importantly, an attempt will be made to understand the effect of such devastation on the survivors and on the society they were creating while under threat of physical extinction.

The absence of hard data makes it impossible to attempt any systematic survey of the impact of disease on the Aborigines of North Queensland in the nineteenth century. Indeed the casual indifference with which white observers reported the incidence and effects of disease among Aborigines makes it difficult even to attempt to communicate a convincing overall impression. Dramatic depopulation resulting from frontier conflict and disease was nonchalantly accepted. In 1883, the editor of the *Port Denison Times* noted the loss of a possible source of labour: 'while the natives are being killed off and otherwise made to rapidly disappear,'

4. P.D.T., 25 March 1876, from the San Francisco *Morning Call*. 
by imported diseases, etc., the colonists get but little work out of them'. Very little attention was paid to Aboriginal afflictions unless they threatened the settlers or were newsworthy. Thus it was reported in 1875 that an epidemic of measles was afflicting the colony and was causing serious loss of life among both Aborigines and Pacific Islanders. While about 58 Pacific Islanders died in the Mackay District, the remnants of the tribe of Aborigines at Cape York were reduced to one man and two women and the Cape River Aborigines died in such large numbers that the Fort Denison Times noted:

in fact they are dying so fast that there are not enough left to bury their dead. This may be an exaggeration, but it is generally known that the natives over a large extent of country are suffering from this disease.

Measles epidemics were briefly reported at Bowen in 1878, and in 1893 a widespread epidemic affected Aborigines in the Gulf Country at Normanton, where five died on the town reserve, at Darnley Island, and at Croydon while 'large numbers' of Aborigines were reported dying on the Flinders.

There must have been other epidemics of introduced diseases which were equally destructive of Aboriginal life such as the 'Gulf fever' of 1866 which killed so many

5. P.D.T., 2 June 1883.
7. M.M., 9 October 1875.
10. Queensland, 16 September 1893, p. 569.
settlers and whooping cough in 1890 at Cooktown, and the influenzas and fevers of various kinds that struck so severely and with such frequency during the nineteenth century. However no published accounts of their effect on Aborigines have been discovered in this research.

Some private reports or complaints of various fatal epidemic illnesses were made. Thus the Aborigines near Cardwell were reported to be suffering from a complaint causing eruptions over all parts of their body which was associated with considerable mortality while at the Bloomfield River during 1886, a disease the Aborigines called 'gangolgee' killed nearly every newborn child and some adults. It was reported to start in the gums and ultimately to eat the whole face away unless silver nitrate was applied early. There had been no births in the previous five months and sixteen deaths from the disease. Such extant reports are few, however, when related to the quickly deteriorating state of Aboriginal health.

It was only when the settlers felt threatened by diseases afflicting the Aborigines that public notice was taken of their condition. Some of these reactions indicate a degree of callousness that makes the previous lack of notice of Aboriginal health quite comprehensible. Thus, in 1879, the editor of the Port Denison Times remarked:

We are given to understand that the blacks camped near the town are suffering from a disease which is carrying them off to their happy hunting grounds in

14. C.C., 7 February 1890.
15. P.D.T., 9 November 1888, influenza reported throughout Queensland.
17. Mr. Griffin, Fairmaed, Cardwell, to Col. Sec., Q.S.A. COL/A666, 7745 of 1891.
considerable numbers. If this be the case the police 
should lose no time in making the original lords of the 
soil move on to some other locality where there is 
no danger of the disease, which may be an infectious 
one, spreading. 19

There had been a measles epidemic the previous year when 
the editor had also urged that the suffering Aborigines be 
kept out of town while the disease lasted. 20 Indeed, 
requests from otherwise unconcerned townsfolk throughout 
North Queensland that diseased Aborigines be prevented 
from having contact with settlers was quite common. 21

The two diseases among Aborigines that aroused most 
public concern were 'leprosy' and 'venereal disease'. In 
both cases these diseases were often wrongly diagnosed. 22

Leprosy was introduced into the Queensland Aboriginal 
population during the nineteenth century through contact 
with the Chinese and Pacific Islanders and became endemic 
in certain areas of North Queensland. 23 Moodie's comment 
on this disease should be noted:

Leprosy, remarkable for the apparent low infectivity 
of cases (or high resistance to the development of 
disease) in those infected, which amounts to the

20. P.D.T., 20 July 1878. The diseases were not believed 
to be the same although it is possible that this 
mortality resulted from the serious complications 
that can accompany measles such as bronchio-pneumonia. 
See F.K. Moodie, Aboriginal Health (Canberra, 1973), 
p. 157. On p. 31 Moodie notes that measles epidemics 
today can affect all age groups with up to 100% 
incidence e.g. on Cape York missions in 1944.
21. J. McGuire, Thornborough, to Col. Sec., 10 January 1895, 
encl. G.S.A. COL/139, 1170 of 1895; C.C., 20 January 
1891, 'A Leprous Aboriginal': concerned with other 
diseases besides leprosy; see also 'Trifling with Death' 
in the same issue. W.R.T., 16 November 1898, letter 
from 'Eye Witness'.
22. Moodie, Aboriginal Health, pp. 163-168 for venereal 
disease and p. 151 for leprosy.
23. ibid., pp. 151, 152.
same thing), a relatively low degree of morbidity among total cases and a negligible mortality, is also remarkable for the intense feelings of horror and revulsion it has generated in Western society — perhaps in all societies which have been influenced by Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. 24

As Moodie indicates, this stems partly from its being confused in the past with more mutilating diseases such as yaws and syphilis and partly from the fact that its diagnosis depended upon the observation of pathological changes which meant that the consequences of being infected with leprosy were greatly exaggerated. People recognized those who were severely afflicted but were unaware of the much larger number who had been infected and only slightly affected, if at all. 25

Even in the nineteenth century, North Queenslanders were informed that there was some doubt as to whether leprosy was contagious but this uncertainty was hardly comforting. 26 Thus, although the importance of leprosy as a health problem among the general population was small, the hostility the disease created towards the Aborigines contributed to the prejudice against them. Indeed, between 1889 and 1899 only 79 cases of leprosy were reliably reported in Queensland, of whom five were Queensland Aborigines, one a half-caste Queensland Aboriginal, 19 Chinese, and 31 Pacific Islanders, four from other parts of Asia, seven English, three Irish and five Queensland colonists by birth. 27 Yet every case or suspected case was greeted with horror and the suspect ruthlessly

24. ibid., p. 151.
25. ibid., pp. 151, 154. There are many cases of arrested infection.
26. P.D.T., 15 December 1877, from Northern Argus: 'The public, right or wrong, have hot hold of the idea that leprosy is contagious'. This report concluded logically enough that there was no proof that it wasn't.
27. 'SUMMARY: Number of Lepers discovered in each year, commencing from 1889', encl. Q.S.A. COL/264.
isolated. In 1888, the Cooktown Courier reported that Chinese lepers at Georgetown had communicated 'that awful and filthy disease' to some blacks, noting that one black leper had one of his hands rotted clean away. Of presumably the same suspected case or cases, the Charters Towers Times reported that the 'fearful scourge of leprosy has taken a great hold on the blacks'. The newspaper could not approve of the direct means allegedly taken to solve the problem:

One of the blackfellows ... had lost nearly all his fingers and toes, and as he persisted in coming into the townships, one wretch of a whiteman is said to have lately shot him down, as the most effective method of preventing its spread among the whites. 29

After Chinese lepers had been isolated on Cooktown's 'North Shore', an allegedly leprous Aboriginal was soon reported and an almost hysterical demand made to exclude the Aborigines who came to the town daily to work. The newspaper looked at the Aborigines with new eyes:

Their filthy rags, which often afford an insufficient covering to satisfy the claims of decency, reek with filth and disease. Verily, our civilization is a delusion and a sham, and we court disease and death in the most appalling shape and knowingly introduce them into our homes. 30

In another article in the same edition the 'other diseases' the Aborigines could transmit to the townsmen were stressed as well as the leprosy and it was alleged that 'many children are even now suffering from ulcerous sores contracted from the blacks'. 31 Significantly no new cases of leprosy were recorded in 1890 or 1891. 32

In 1895, the Croydon Golden Age had noted the leprosy was 'on the increase' in Queensland and referred to a

28. C.C., 24 April 1888.
30. C.C., 20 January 1891, 'A Leprous Aboriginal'.
31. Ibid., 'Trifling with Death'.
32. 'Summary', encl. Q.S.A. COL/264, loc. cit.
case diagnosed by the Medical Officer at Normanton in the 'blacks' camp' where a second was suspected. The newspaper urged residents of Croydon to prevent Aborigines "apparently free from the disease to handle or approach our clothes or household utensils" and requested that the Croydon Aborigines be examined for signs of the disease. 33

The exaggerated response of the colonists to the threat of leprosy increased their prejudice against Aborigines. They clearly equated leprosy with defilement resulting from their association with degraded coloured races and thought it was a moral outrage for white people to have the disease.

Venereal disease deserves special consideration not only because of the extent and seriousness with which it afflicted the Aboriginal population but also because of the European reaction. Yet, strangely enough, although diseases confidently diagnosed by medical and lay men alike, as 'venereal diseases' were known to be very widespread indeed among the Aborigines, these did not provoke the hysterical response associated with leprosy. It seems, in part, this stemmed from the realization that these diseases derived from the colonists and were common among Europeans. It is also apparent that the colonists believed they were often curable by nineteenth century medicine. However, attempts to cope with the threat venereal disease among Aborigines posed to the health of colonists led to government intervention and a policy which had considerable significance in the formulation and implementation of the 1897 Protection Act.

The term, venereal diseases, in the nineteenth century covered two distinct diseases, gonorrhoea and syphilis, the latter itself encompassing three related diseases:

33. P.B.T., 31 August 1895, from Croydon Golden Age.
venereal syphilis, non-venereal syphilis, and yaws. Moodie points out that yaws was probably present in the Aboriginal population of northern Australia before contact with Europeans and was probably often diagnosed as the related disease, syphilis, to which yaws in fact can provide cross-immunity. It would be foolish for me to debate whether the disease diagnosed by such nineteenth century doctors as Roth was venereal syphilis, non-venereal syphilis, or yaws. It is clear, however, that many Aborigines were infected with an obvious disfiguring disease which destroyed their health and often led to death. It was believed that they were infected by contact, chiefly sexual, with the European or Chinese colonists and firmly held that the Aboriginal population then became a source of infection for the colonists. It was also thought that the disease was much more virulent among the Aborigines and much more difficult to cure. Roth wrote:

By the term 'venereal' as commonly employed, must be


There are conflicting theories about the origin of syphilis:

There are two schools of thought on the origin of syphilis - the Unitarian or Unionist, and the Columbian. The Unitarians or Unionists believe that there are many diseases in the world which are in fact one and the same disease, altered only by social conditions, personal habits and climate. This disease the Unitarians call treponematosis. Syphilis, say the Unitarians, is but one form of it. Yaws is another.

The Columbian school on the other hand believes that the disease of syphilis did not exist in Europe or the East until Columbus and his men returned with it from their voyage of discovery of the Americas in March 1493. Syphilis, this theory holds, is distinct and different from some other forms of treponematoses such as yaws but related ... Unlike venereal syphilis all other forms of treponematosis endemic syphilis, yaws, bejel, pinta are not potential killers. Nor do they cause pre-natal infection.

understood at least three distinct diseases – gonorrhoea, venereal sore, and syphilis. ... Gonorrhoea assumes a virulent form among those North Queensland aboriginals who practice [sic] introcision – 'whistling.' Venereal sore is generally of an aggravated type. Syphilis may answer to the ordinary drugs, merculials, and iodides, but unfortunately this disease takes on very often a malignant or galloping form running a rapidly destructive course ... I firmly hold to the opinion that syphilis, as a rule, assumes a far more serious aspect owing to its comparatively recent introduction among the natives, a long series of previous generations not having been inoculated with it. 36

It is fortunate that on this subject Roth's reports provide a reasonably comprehensive and objective overall picture. Roth had been in North Queensland since 1894 and was appointed Northern Protector of Aborigines on 1 January 1898. This position involved extensive travelling and interaction with other medical officers throughout the north. Roth concluded that it was impossible to estimate the precise number of Aborigines suffering from venereal disease but indicated as accurately as possible the situation in 1900. He asserted venereal disease was 'very prevalent' in the north-western districts and along Cape York Peninsula, especially on the lower shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria; at Cloncurry where the few remaining Aborigines were nearly all diseased; at Camooweal where nearly all of the 35 Aborigines in the camp were infected; at Normanton, where about half of the 176 Aborigines were slightly infected; and at Mt. Garnet, where the Aborigines were 'reeking with syphilis etc.' Indeed, he concluded syphilis was common near white settlement generally. The reports from Cloncurry, Camooweal, Normanton, and Mt. Garnet, were derived from local medical officers. 37

It can be thus seen that according to late nineteenth century medical opinion, an easily observed, serious disease

37. ibid., p. 1335.
identified as 'venereal disease' was afflicting many groups of Aborigines in plague proportions. In his annual report for 1899, Roth had described syphilis as 'fairly common in the townships' which seems to indicate more the settler's expectation that Aborigines would inevitably have 'syphilis' than the epidemic proportions of the disease. In 1901, the Sydney Bulletin reported that Roth had estimated that 6,000 of the 16,000 Aborigines he was responsible for were then suffering venereal diseases.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that the condition of the Aborigines with regard to 'venereal disease' throughout much of the period being studied was much as Roth reported in 1901. Aboriginal women were taken into some stations even before hostilities in the Bowen District ceased and were reliably reported to have contacted 'venereal disease' and to be infecting the European employees of the station. Responsible government officials reported 'venereal disease' very prevalent at Cloncurry and Winton in 1887, at Bowen in 1889, at Atherton in 1892, (only three years after the Aborigines were let in), at Cooktown, and at Normanton and along the Gulf coast.

38. ibid. Roth had worked in North Queensland since 1894 and his position as Northern Protector involved extensive travelling.
40. Bulletin, 10 August 1901, Bertie Newspaper Cuttings, 63 (N.L.). The Bulletin wrote: '6,000 are suffering from virulent contagious disease obtained originally by contact with the noble white man'. The use of the singular 'disease', the tone of moral disapproval, and the refusal to be specific strongly suggest that 'venereal disease' is implied.
41. F.D.T.: 1 May 1869; 22 May 1869, 'Shall We Admit the Blacks'; F.D.T., 5 June 1869, letter from 'Within 100 Miles of the Burdekin'.
to Barketown in 1897. There were also shocked or alarmed comments by private citizens, two of which (one in 1892 and one in 1898) led to large scale enquiries resulting in both corroboration and denial of the allegations that venereal disease was widespread among the Aborigines. The evidence previously referred to indicates that the denials were whitewash resulting from police sympathetic to the locals accused of having sexual relations with Aboriginal women.

42. Sub. Insp. F. Urquhart, N.M.P., Corella (near Cloncurry), to Sub. Insp. Carr, Winton, 5 May 1897, estimated 50% males and 30% of females 'in a more or less advanced stage of the disease', in or near Cloncurry all adults and some young children and 'wild blacks' in the ranges nearly as bad; P.M., Cloncurry (at Brisbane), to Col. Sec., 7 February 1897; C.P.S., Bowen, to Under Col. Sec., 5 April 1899, encl. minute from Bench of four magistrates: 'serious amount of venereal disease' among Aborigines; Insp. Lamond, Cooktown, to Pol. Com., 29 May 1897: 'nearly all half-civilized blacks'; Insp. Lamond, Cooktown, to Pol. Com., 24 November 1897; all above encl. file 416M, Pol. Com. Office, Brisbane. See also Insp. Lamond, Herberton, to Pol. Com., 9 September 1892, Q.S.A. COL/A710, 11299 of 1892: Atherton blacks in a 'most deplorable condition from syphilis and other venereal diseases'; Finucane, pro Pol. Com., to J. Hill-Wray, Sec., Central Board of Health, Brisbane, 18 May 1892, encl. Q.S.A. COL/A710, 11299 of 1892: Medical Officer at Winton reported syphilis was 'very prevalent amongst blacks'; 1897 V. & P., Vol. II, p. 10 for Parry-Okeden's comment on the diseased state of the Aborigines at Normanton and along the southern Gulf coast; Act. Sgt. F. Quain, Camaowal, to Insp. Graham, Normanton, 16 November 1898, encl. Q.S.A. COL/142, 15678 of 1898: 'almost impossible to find one - male or female - that is not suffering from Venereal disease in some form or other'.

43. See file, 'The "Wild Australia" troupe' Q.S.A. COL/A752, 12387 of 1893; Brab Purcell, Brisbane, to Col. Sec., 14 November 1892, and Insp. A. Douglas, Brisbane, to Pol. Com., 1 December 1892, Q.S.A. COL/A717, 14199 of 1892. The above correspondence refers to the charges made by Brab Purcell who toured western Queensland collecting Aborigines and artefacts for his and Archibald Meston's 'Wild Australia' troupe which was to tour the eastern capitals and overseas. The enterprise failed - Purcell's reputation was not good and his sensational use of the charges was counterproductive. However, see also A. Meston, S.P.A., Brisbane, to Under Sec., Home Sec., 21 December 1899, and W.C. Hume, Brisbane to Home Sec., 13 October 1898, encl. Q.S.A. COL/140, 16178 of 1899, re Hume's allegation of widespread venereal disease and prostitution of Aboriginal women in western
If the prevalence of 'venereal disease' among the Aborigines was accepted with a certain equanimity, the infection of Europeans by Aborigines frequently caused alarm even though the Europeans suffered much less.  

Sub Inspector Urquhart, as early as 1887, officially reported that venereal disease was 'fairly well spread' among the European population in the Cloncurry District through intercourse with the Aborigines. Local chemists were selling 'startling' quantities of medicine to those inflicted. In fact, doctors in northern and western hospitals informed Inspector Lamond that fully 70% of the venereal disease cases in the Lock Hospitals resulted from intercourse with the Aborigines.  

When this source of infection was brought to the notice of the government in 1887 it looked for a solution but baulked at the immensity of the problem of building, staffing, and maintaining special Lock Hospitals, and isolating nomadic Aborigines. The still greater task of curbing the lust of the colonists

43. (cont.) Queensland at Hughenden, Cloncurry, Urandangie, Boulia, Birdsville, and Windorah. Meston claimed Hume's and the investigating police officer's reports were 'really mild compared with the reality'. See Minute A.M., 2 March 1899, to Memorandum W.E. Parry-Okeden, 24 February 1899. See also W.R.T., 16 November 1898, letter from 'Eye Witness' and J. Withnall, Whitsunday Island, to Meston, Frazer's Island, 15 March 1898, Q.S.A. COL/143, 11351 of 1898.


45. Urquhart to Carr, 5 May 1887, loc. cit.

46. Lamond to Pol. Com., 24 November 1897, loc. cit. See also Lamond to Pol. Com., 29 May 1897, where he alleges 'nearly all' venereal disease cases stemmed from Aboriginal women.
was not even mentioned. It was eventually resolved that the police would bring cases under the notice of the medical officer.\textsuperscript{47} In 1892, when it was realized that the disease was posing a more widespread threat to the European population, the central Board of Health requested that government medical officers and the police 'be instructed to supply mercurial ointment to the Aborigines and instruct them in its use in districts where the Aborigines were suffering from syphilis. This token policy was adopted. It thus left the responsibility for diagnosis and medication mainly in the hands of country policemen.\textsuperscript{48} Before 1897, it seems that only at Winton, Cloncurry, Bowen, and Herberton, were medical officers participating in the treatment of Aborigines and these had been directed to do so.\textsuperscript{49} It is doubtful if the police were much involved with medicating to Aborigines beyond these districts before 1897 when Parry-Okeden's inauguration of the policy of conciliation and protection allowed police officers such as Inspector Lamond and Sergeant Whiteford scope to express their concern at Laura, the Musgrave, Cen, and the Bloomfield River.\textsuperscript{50} Indeed Lamond's interest in alleviating the distress caused by venereal disease to both

\textsuperscript{47} P.M., Cloncurry, to Col. Sec., 7 February 1887, and Minute, B.D.M. \textsuperscript{[Col. Sec. Morehead]}, 9 February 1887, encl. file 410M, Pol. Com's Office.

\textsuperscript{48} Hill-Wray, Sec., Central Board of Health, to Col. Sec., 31 May 1892, and Minute H.T. \textsuperscript{[Col. Sec. Tozer]}, encl. Q.S.A. COL/AT10, 11299 of 1892.


\textsuperscript{50} Roth, Cooktown, to Pol. Com., 28 July 1898, encl. Q.S.A. COL/142, 9665 of 1898; Lamond, Cooktown, to Pol. Com., 29 May 1897; Lamond to Pol. Com., 3 June 1897, and Minute W.E.P.O. \textsuperscript{[Pol. Com]}, 26 June 1897, with enclosure G. Hislop, Bloomfield River, to Insp. Lamond, 1 June 1897, encl. file 410M, Pol. Com's Office.
the Aborigines, and the infected white population was important. In 1892 he expressed an urgent concern for the problem although he felt it was incapable of solution. When Parry-Okeden inaugurated the policy of protection in 1897, he grasped the opportunity to bring the magnitude of the problem to his Police Commissioner and twice urged that Roth be appointed as a full time medical officer to cope with the problem. In his tour of inspection of North Queensland in 1896, Parry-Okeden had been accompanied by Lamond from Cooktown, had met Roth and been most impressed by his ethnographical work and his publication, *Ethnological Studies Among the North-West-Central Queensland Aborigines*, and suggested strongly the appointment of a doctor to work among the Aborigines. Indeed, Parry-Okeden indicated he envisaged the expansion of the 1892 policy:

He [the doctor] could always be moving about with the Native Police detachments, prescribing for the sick and instructing the officers and others how to treat syphilis and other prevalent diseases, and attending to quarantined blacks.

Thus attempts to cope with the problem confronting the colonists because of the prevalence of 'venereal disease' among the Aborigines, had caused the acceptance of a social service responsibility to Aborigines which was inadequately applied ad hoc until 1897 when it was accepted that a comprehensive solution to the problem was needed. This resulted in the appointment of a medical officer, Dr. Roth, as first Northern Protector of Aborigines. It was typical of Queensland's post 1897 policy that he was expected as

51. Lamond to Pol. Com., 9 September 1892, and Minute, D.T. Seymour /Pol. Com/7, 19 September 1892, Q.S.A. COL/A710, 11299 of 1892.
53. 'Report on the North Queensland Aborigines and the Native Police', 1897 V. & P., Vol. II, p. 32. See also p. 31 for his impressions of Roth's ethnographical work.
well to conduct ethnographical research, be a senior civil service administrator, and work with the police for the protection of the Aborigines.

However, epidemics, leprosy, and 'venereal disease' were but part of the health problem of Aborigines in nineteenth century North Queensland. At the end of his first year as Northern Protector, Roth reported:

All the minor ailments afflicting European communities are met with amongst the aboriginal population, though what with ignorance and superstition, want of proper care and nourishment, etc., their effects are not so transitory. 54

Here Roth has indicated that poor Aboriginal health was an integral part, indeed, a factor of the relationship between Aborigines and the colonists. What most observers saw as problems of Aboriginal health, or of Aboriginal disease, could not be treated in isolation from the social condition of Aborigines. They were no more 'Aboriginal problems' than they were problems of European or multi-racial societies. It was also a political problem because of the acceptance of the deplorable health and high mortality of the Aboriginal community by the white power structure. 'Proper care and nourishment' indicated an awareness of the possibility of intervention. Aboriginal health was a racial problem in the nineteenth century which has only emerged as a politico-racial problem in the twentieth century because

Aborigines have now gained a political voice.  

In Curr's survey of various aspects of Aboriginal Australia published in 1886 and 1887, his informants for North Queensland gave as major causes of death: syphilis, 56 venereal disease, 57 measles, 58 consumption, 59 bronchitis, 60 fever, 61 lung disease, 62 influenza. 63 Two separate informants gave 'drink' and 'want of food' as major causes of death in their areas. 64 Even these crude diagnoses if coupled with Roth's more informed comment suggest a more complex picture of primary and secondary infection, complicated by poor nutrition.

55. Evans has well brought out the fact that the colony treated callously, even by nineteenth century standards, its few white citizens who were unable to fulfil a 'worthwhile' social role - that is, those who were poor, lepers, mentally ill, and suffering from venereal disease. It would be simplistic to argue from this that Aborigines were being treated in a similar manner to whites in the same condition. It does perhaps indicate that the whole Aboriginal community was being categorized, along with the whites mentioned above, as socially and morally degraded rather than socially and politically disadvantaged by the dominant white majority. Evans has clearly indicated the attitude of the political leaders to such whites and their concern for 'morality, economy and discipline'. See Evans, Charitable Institutions, pp. 286-291.

56. Curr, The Australian Race, Vol. II, pp. 306, 322, 400, 403, 464 ('skin disease': possibly syphilis or yaws). In many areas no comment was made upon the cause of Aboriginal mortality.

60. ibid., Vol. II, p. 401.
64. ibid., Vol. II, p. 426, 484.
In fact the white colonists were well aware that close contact with them destroyed the health of the Aborigines, though they had little understanding of the complex causes of that deterioration. There is ample evidence that they were well aware of the good health of those first let in although they, perhaps, should not have expected this considering the difficulties the period of dispersal must have imposed on Aborigines. Thus one newly contacted group was considered 'as fine a race of blacks as ever I have seen in any part of the world where I have been', while the first Aborigines brought into Cooktown were declared 'less degraded specimens of humanity than the blacks between this port and Rockhampton'.

In 1890, an incident occurred at Bowen that dramatically contrasted the health of traditional Aboriginal life with the health destroying life Aborigines experienced after contact. A number of Aborigines long thought to be dead, with kinship ties with the Bowen Aborigines, had isolated themselves from contact with the intruders on the islands off the coast. They were obviously aware of the settlers' presence and had eventually been drawn to the town. The Port Denison Times enthusiastically reported on their 'robust appearance and the presence of two picanninies' and added, 'For a long time no black babies have been seen about Bowen, the reason being that the blacks, like their dogs, are too thoroughly diseased'. Presumably the few children who were born and survived were half-caste. Roth also noted that the health

65. P.D.T., 5 August 1871, 'Natives on the Northern Telegraph Line: Extracts from a Letter of Man on Line'.
66. P.D.T., 23 July 1881, from C.C., 13 July 1881. See also P.D.T., 19 January 1884, for an indication of the changed appearance of the Bowen Aborigines. See also P.D.T., 5 August 1871, 'Natives on the Northern Telegraph Line'.
67. P.D.T., 20 December 1890.
of 'town blacks' was much inferior to 'bush blacks'. Among town blacks carious teeth were more prevalent while even the more serious diseases 'syphilis' and 'phthisis' (tuberculosis) became rarer in the unsettled districts. Near Burketown, the 'bush blacks' were reported 'all in very good health' but those at the township were diseased. The police forced these to leave the town and they were soon reported 'much more healthy' when they resumed their hunting and foraging and much of their traditional diet. The main disease they were suffering from was claimed to be syphilis so the apparent improvement of this, or a similarly serious and unsightly illness, by the removal from the town clearly illustrates the health destroying environment of the town camps.

What struck most nineteenth century observers about Aboriginal health was the devastating impact of epidemic diseases. The medical knowledge that has been accumulated in the twentieth century indicates that much less spectacular factors had a longer and still more devastating effect. Had epidemic diseases to which the Aborigines had little or no inbuilt immunity been the principal health hazard facing them as a result of European contact, the effects would not have been lasting. The depleted population which survived the initial devastation would have acquired immunity and the population would ultimately have recovered.

69. Lamond, Normanton, to Pol. Com., 20 November 1899, encl. file 390M, Pol. Com's Office. See also Const. Holmes, Townsville, to Insp. Fitzgerald, Townsville, 3 April 1898, encl. G.S.A. COL/143, 14774 of 1898: mentions the coastal Aborigines near settlement on the Herbert River were diseased and addicted to opium while those inland were not.
In 1960, Abbie outlined simply physical changes which had taken place among Australian Aborigines as a result of European contact and subsequent researchers have been adding to this picture. The Aborigines' way of life had not traditionally needed to withstand many or serious infective diseases and their nomadic habits, nakedness, and the constant exposure to the sun had rendered their life style hygienic. The use of clothing which often became filthy and verminous meant that it became a health hazard especially when it was worn wet and thus encouraged respiratory infections. Squalid, unhygienic permanent or semi-permanent housing on permanent camp sites was conducive to gastrointestinal infections and debilitating parasitic loads. Dietary changes led to subnutrition or malnutrition. A balanced diet was replaced by one often seriously unbalanced, especially those associated with fringe settlements where danger of infection was highest. Here natural meat and vegetables were often replaced by European flour and bread, sugar, and inadequate amounts of protein, coupled with an increased fat content.

There were some simple physical consequences of this change of life style, apart from an apparently higher level of immunity to imported diseases, such as changes in the blood chemistry, a probable rise in mean blood pressures, a severe deterioration of the teeth, and a change in the menstrual pattern of Aboriginal women. Under traditional circumstances menstruation was scanty and infrequent whereas, when they began to live a more settled life, it became more profuse and more frequent. This presumably implied the possibility of increased fertility once factors conducive to sterility were reduced. 71

71. A.A. Abbie, 'Physical Changes in Australian Aborigines Consequent Upon European Contact', Oceania, 31 (September 1960), pp. 140-144.
Packer's remark made of twentieth century Aborigines that 'European disease coupled with the Aboriginal way of life makes survival very difficult' was even truer of nineteenth century Aborigines. The physical, psychosocial, and sociocultural deprivation that Nurcombe describes was just as true in the nineteenth century. The children of the disturbed Aboriginal culture were often malnourished. In a survey of Queensland Aboriginal settlements from 1967 to 1969, Jose and Welch discovered that 50% of the children between six months and three years were affected by growth retardation, 16% of this age group severely so. It was suggested that there was a deficiency of multiple nutritional factors in these children initiated by nutritional deficiency in pregnant mothers and infants and inadequate early infant feeding. Infections were followed by intestinal malabsorption which accentuated the effect of inadequate nutrition. Such growth retarded children were found to have heavier loads of intestinal parasites which again would have drained their nutrient resources. These children suffered a disproportionate number of deaths from gastroenteritis and pneumonia and cases of deafness. This study and others suggest that growth retardation, high mortality, and permanent defects


such as deafness and brain damage are associated with malnutrition. 75

Thus a drastically changed nineteenth century Aboriginal environment could produce children who were physically and mentally crippled within one generation. Moodie has described how Aboriginal children born into an unhygienic, poor socio-economic environment will even today run a gauntlet of malnutrition, repeated infections and intestinal parasites, leading to probable anaemia, underweight, and lowered immunity until late childhood and early adult life when

a prolonged 'survival-of-the-fittest' battle ... will have left him some residual effects - retarded growth, permanently damaged organs (hearts, lungs, kidneys, intestinal mucous membrane, ears, eyes, teeth, bones and joints, or cerebral cortex). 76

Tragically, Moodie and Nurcombe both stress the cyclical nature of the total Aboriginal health problem. Aborigines who have been handicapped because of their physical deprivation will probably rear their children in suboptimal conditions where they are then exposed to many pathogens. 77 The health problems will thus be passed on from one generation to the next.

* * * *

A major factor affecting the health of the Aborigines and their acculturation was their use of alcohol and opium and the willingness of the colonists to exploit their desire for them. Recent anthropological and medical

75. Moodie, Aboriginal Health, ch. 10: 'Morbidity and Malnutrition and the Anaemias', passim.
76. Ibid., p. 246. See pp. 244-247, 'Aboriginal Health Status in "Empty Australia": The "Typical" Case'.
research is more helpful in understanding this addiction than the evidence of the nineteenth century. Thus Stanner observed of the Murinbata of the Daly River area:

Alcoholism among the aborigines is part of a more general syndrome which includes the avid use of tobacco, narcotics and painkilling drugs, and the mania for gambling. The things on which the aborigines now place most value are the immediate things of the present. This is due to the collapse of a tradition in which the future took care of itself by being continuous with the past. After the collapse, and before futurity became a problem in itself, the immediacies of life assumed prime value. In the aborigines' new situation, there are no more pleasurable and novel immediacies than the gratifications of tobacco, alcohol and drugs, the relief of pain and the excitements of gambling. 78

Cawte's comment is also pertinent to the nineteenth century:

Although alcoholism is found in a number of Aboriginal people it is open to question whether it is more prevalent than in European Australians. What is clear is that Aborigines are less protected against its severe effects by their economy, by their social network and by the availability of medical services. In the crowded environment of slum, fringe or settlement, even a small number of alcoholics has a disintegrative effect \[sic\] on the community in general. 79

In hard-drinking, nineteenth century North Queensland, while the complaints of Aboriginal drinking are numerous, the amount consumed must have been dwarfed by that drunk by the non-Aboriginal population. Thus Bolton records that at various times during the 1870's there were 92 licensed publicans in Charters Towers, 70 on the Palmer, 79 on the


Hodgkinson and 62 at Cooktown. Admittedly, these were mining towns. In 1876, these four centres contained 207 of the 1,000 licensed premises in Queensland and had one licensed house to every thirty-six people. As well as licensed hotels, there were numerous unlicensed shanties away from the centres of population. Similarly with opium, the amount used by the Chinese must have been far greater than that used by Aborigines. However, in both cases the Aborigines were not physically or culturally accustomed to their use and could not localize the consumption or the consequences in hotels, 'opium dens', or homes as the Europeans and Chinese largely did.

The supply of alcohol to Aborigines was a breach of clause 51 of the 'Publicans Act' which stemmed from New South Wales experience as has been seen in Chapter 2, p. 46. However, Aborigines easily obtained liquor in three main ways. Many publicans sold directly to Aborigines without much fear of the legal consequences. In fact, in 1898, Roth wished to ban employment of Aborigines in public houses because they were paid in alcohol and supplied it

81. P.M., Cunnamulla, to Col. Sec., 16 September 1872, Q.S.A. COL/171, 1613 of 1872: 'An Act to Consolidate the Laws Relating to Licensed Publicans of 1863: 27 Vic. no. 16'. Clause 51 forbade selling, supplying or giving spirituous liquors, fermented liquors or drinks containing either of these to any Aboriginal of Queensland or New Holland. The penalty was not to exceed £5, one half of such fine to go to the informer.
82. P.D.T.: 2 October 1886; 9 February 1889, from Cooktown Independent; 19 January 1884; 26 April 1894; C.C.: 21 October 1899; 27 September 1895; P.D.T., 19 April 1879, accused Don Hotel of selling wholesale and retail to Aborigines; P.D.T., 18 December 1900, 'Proserpine Notes'; Sen. Sgt. B. Carney, Ravenswood, to Insp. Isley, Townsville, 8 February 1887, q.S.A. POL/11B/64, pp. 51, 52, complaining of the difficulty he had in preventing publicans' selling to the Aborigines.
to other Aborigines. Before the end of his first two months as Northern Protector during which time he had been confined to the Cooktown District, he reported:

Certainly, in Cooktown, the publicans are indeed among the greatest sinners in supplying alcohol to the aboriginals. 83

In 1889, the Cooktown Independent had virtually accused the police of graft and urged the Police Commissioner to take action adding that it was notorious that the Aborigines were rolling drunk about the streets on Saturday and Sunday 'and never within the last three years has one publican been fined for poisoning the victims of Cooktown civilization'. The charge of police involvement with the publicans was hinted at on other occasions. 85

There were two other methods by which the Aborigines obtained alcohol illegally. They apparently had no difficulty in finding settlers whom they would pay to buy it for them; and they always could, and commonly did, prostitute their women for alcohol. The Cooktown Independent wrote of 'the poor devil [the Aboriginal] who owned the land before we came here and sells his gin for a nobbler of rum'. 87 In addition residents sometimes remunerated Aboriginal employees with drink because of the high value they placed upon it. It seems that at Bowen the Aborigines would not take work unless they were paid in cash with which they could purchase intoxicants. 88 Undoubtedly, the records of North Queensland in the nineteenth century reveal that the Aborigines, in common with Aborigines elsewhere in Australia, were strongly

84. P.D.T., 9 February 1889, from Cooktown Independent.
85. P.D.T.: 19 January 1884; 22 May 1886; 26 April 1884.
86. P.D.T., 22 May 1886.
88. P.D.T., 2 October 1886, letter signed 'In Terrorem'. See also P.D.T., 19 January 1884, letter signed 'A Resident' where a similar situation is implied.
addicted to alcohol. They also reveal a European addiction to exploit this that was probably best brought out by a publican, Malpass, of Ravenswood in 1887. A settler, Freudenberg, was reprimanding Malpass for selling alcohol to the Aborigines when an Aboriginal woman came up and purchased two shillings worth of grog from Malpass who explained: 'You know, Fred, I cannot refuse money. You know I cannot'. 89

The settlers objected because they found the presence of drunken Aborigines unsightly and annoying, 90 as well as dangerous or potentially dangerous. 91 The editor of the Port Denison Times illustrated this fear with more charity than most:

The blackfellow sober as we know him about here, is not a bad sort of fellow but the same individual drunk is a terror, and all sorts of care should be taken that he has no opportunity of getting into that condition. 92

This European attitude was directed towards other non-European races in Queensland. Thus, the Port Denison Times warned against supplying liquor to Cingalese after four had a drunken spree outside of Bowen and one ended up in Hospital, 96 while Judge Lilley reported in 1896:

The crime had its origin as usual - nay as these offences by Kanakas almost invariably have - in the supply of drink to islanders by publicans who are now becoming known as mean whites. 94

89. Senior Sgt. B. Carney, Ravenswood, to Insp. Isley, Townsville, 3 February 1887, Q.S.A. POL/11B/64, p. 51. Freudenberg may have been another publican. He had been previously accused of selling grog to the Aborigines. The above quotation has had punctuation added.
90. P.D.T.: 9 February 1889, from Cooktown Independent; 22 May 1886; C.C.: 4 December 1891; 21 October 1892.
91. P.D.T.: 17 November 1883; 26 April 1884; C.C., 6 September 1889.
92. P.D.T., 12 January 1884.
93. P.D.T., 22 May 1886.
94. Judge Lilley's Report 8/1899, Regina V. Pollybogomena (Jacky), Lombo (Bob), and Bollo, Q.S.A. EX3/5, 96 of 1899.
It is not possible to make a cross-cultural comparison with nineteenth century European crime and violence associated with the consumption of alcohol, but one would suspect that there was a high correlation. One would also expect that among such disorientated people as the Aborigines, Pacific Islanders, and other non-European migrant groups – especially where consumption of alcohol was not a part of the culture – there would be a high degree of tension-relieving violence. Yet, strangely enough, in this study there has been no evidence of any significant link between alcohol consumption by Aborigines and crimes against Europeans or European property. The charges made were of potential violence or criminal acts, some of which were alleged to be inevitable. There is evidence to suggest, however, that alcohol exacerbated the considerable tensions associated with the unaccustomed high-density living of camp life near European settlements. ⁹⁵

Apart from their fear that the intoxicated Aborigines would rape their women, ⁹⁶ the colonists' main fear seems to have been that, under the influence of alcohol, the Aborigines would refuse to acknowledge the authority of the white man. The white colonists expected coloured races to be subservient. Thus the editor of the Port Denison Times reported that 'the blacks were getting very bad in the town' because one very intoxicated Aboriginal told the editor 'to go to hell' when rebuked for being drunk. ⁹⁷ There were many complaints that Aborigines in Charters Towers were 'very insulting' when intoxicated. ⁹⁸ Underpinning all

⁹⁵. C.C., 6 September 1889; P.D.T., 19 January 1884, letter signed 'A Resident'.
⁹⁶. P.D.T.: 17 November 1883; 26 April 1884; 2 October 1886, letter signed 'In Terrorem'.
⁹⁷. P.D.T., 31 March 1883.
⁹⁸. C.C., 6 September 1889, reporting on Charters Towers' Aborigines.
the fears was the belief that under the influence of alcohol 'the wild strain is sure to come out'. The colonists believed there was a qualitative difference between a drunken European and a drunken 'savage' such as a Pacific Islander or an Aboriginal. In both groups 'all the evil passions' could be aroused to a point where they ceased to be human. As a sympathetic Bowen resident remarked:

They may be seen drunk coming away from the public houses, sometimes in such a frenzy of excitement that if they committed any serious crime, such as murder, they could not justly be held responsible for their actions. 101

Yet to increase their profits publicans often sold cheap 'vile and maddening mixtures'. Sometimes half a plug of tobacco was mixed with a bottle of rum. A settler claimed: 'There is no doubt that these liquors are adulterated with such drugs as excite the brain of these unfortunate creatures'.

One could not say with any certainty that, in this period, the Aborigines drank as a defiance of European authority, a characteristic Beckett has attributed to the part-Aborigines he studied in northern New South Wales. 104 It is clear, however, that the dependence on alcohol of a large number of Aborigines was an adaptive mechanism releasing the tensions that had built up in the acculturation process and providing an exhilaration no longer to be found in their traditional life and absent from their relationship

100. 'Judge Lilley's Report 8/1089, Regina V. Pollybogomena (Jacky), Lombo (Bob), and Bolo', Q.S.A. EXE/5, 96 of 1889.
102. 'Judge Lilley's Report 8/1089, Regina V. Pollybogomena (Jacky), Lombo (Bob), and Bolo', Q.S.A. EXE/5, 96 of 1889.
103. P.D.T., 2 October 1886, letter signed 'In Terrorem'. See Bolton, op. cit., p. 66.
105. See Moodie, Aboriginal Health, p. 106.
with the colonists who placed them in the role of cheap, subservient drudges. It is, perhaps, significant that in the earliest settled Bowen District, by the 1880's the Aborigines were rejecting this role and demanding the escapist of alcohol. They were no longer willing to accept aids to a subsistence such as tomahawks or shirts, but demanded cash so they could buy alcohol. 106

During the nineteenth century North Queensland was colonized by two races who made great use of two potent tension releasing drugs; for while the Europeans introduced the Aborigines to alcohol, the Chinese introduced them to opium. Moreover, facing atypical environmental, social, and economic challenges, the two groups made much greater use of alcohol and opium than in the parent cultures. In the acculturative process the Aborigines found themselves in, it was understandable they would resort to these drugs and, in their use, caricature the two colonizing cultures.

By 1876, it was reported that 'The Queensland aborigines have dropped in for a new sensation. ... the wretched blacks have taken with avidity to the practice of opium smoking'. 107 Subsequent reports indicate that Aboriginal usage of opium spread widely during the late 1870's and the early 1880's. 108 A correspondent calling himself 'A Practical Man' claimed that in 1882 he had strongly urged the government to prevent the Aborigines receiving opium.

106. P.D.T.: 19 January 1884, letter signed 'A Resident'; 2 October 1886, letter signed 'In Terrorem'.
by 1886, he believed it was too late as the Aboriginals were so widely used to it they would not work for anything else.  

A station manager from western Queensland in the same year claimed that there was opium on almost every station and in every scalp-hunter's camp.

The consumption of opium in Queensland in the last quarter of the nineteenth century was enormous. In 1899, over 30,000 lbs of opium were imported of which only a minute amount was used for 'medicinal purposes'. In 1891, the Pharmacy Board had informed the Colonial Secretary that less than twenty pounds of opium was used 'for medicinal purposes' each year in Queensland. The Colonial Secretary made the obvious deduction:

The inference from that must be that all the rest of the enormous quantity of opium imported into the colony must be used for smoking purposes.

The figure is deceptive as most of the opium, as shall be seen, was twice used. After the initial smoking, the opium ash or dross could be smoked again, eaten, or drunk in water as it contained 7% morphine.

Although there are no statistics available, there is no doubt that the Chinese were the main purchasers and users


110. Queensland, 3 July 1886, letter 'Opium Smoking in Queensland', signed 'Manager'. Scalp-hunters were those men who killed marsupials for the bounties imposed by government appointed Marsupial Boards.


113. Ibid. At this time it was also estimated that Victoria imported 18,000 lb. of Indian opium annually and about 400 lb. of Turkish opium for medicinal purposes.

of opium. However, it is likely that European Australians were using much more than would be now thought possible. At the turn of the century, about one in every 400 Americans were using opiates regularly, most being women who had been given them for medical reasons.\footnote{115}{\textit{\textbf{Drug Addiction and Abuse}}, The Encyclopedia Americana: International Edition, Vol. 9, (New York, 1971), p. 415.} Probably some opium imported into Queensland was used by Europeans as home remedies or in patent medicines for such complaints as coughing, gastric complaints, and pain.\footnote{116}{R.N.C., X, 'Opium', Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 16, (1961, Chicago, London, Toronto), p. 815.} As well some European Queenslanders used opium for pleasure.\footnote{117}{P.D.T., 23 December 1893, 'What Opium Smoking Feels Like by One Who Has Tried It'; 24 November 1900, Police Court; O.P.D., of L.C., LXIII, p. 1891, p. 109, A.J. Thynne in second reading of 'Sale and Use of Poisons Bill'; O.P.D., of L.A., LXIV, 1891, p. 709, Paul in motion for adjournment.} A moderate use of opium for relaxation drew little or no disapproval and was indulged in by rich and poor. The picture Mary Gilmore painted of its use in New South Wales was true of Queensland. She pointed out:

\begin{quote}
Quite a good deal was used in a diffused way ... Addicts, however, among decent people were rare. ... I remember addicts among station owners. Apart from these, the ordinary person took opium as a sedative, pretty much as we take aspirin nowadays. Old nurses always had a supply of it, which they themselves took regularly, and gave, after childbirth, to make the patient sleep. I well remember many who retired at a certain hour every day to have their sedative pipe. ... Others who were addicted to it in a mild way were shepherds.\footnote{118}{M. Gilmore, \textit{Old Days: Old Ways}, (Sydney, 1963), pp. 22, 23.}
\end{quote}

In the 1890's, grave concern - which the Queensland government was aware of - was expressed by the Chinese government at the consumption of opium in that country.\footnote{119}{Q.P.D. of L.A., LXV, 1891, p. 1735, Col. Sec. Tozer in second reading in 'Sale and Use of Poisons Bill'.}
while in the United States concerned scientists were attempting to find a substitute that would not lead to physical dependence and thought they had succeeded in 1898 when, ironically, they produced the morphine derivative, heroin. Yet, in Queensland before 1897, despite some concern at alleged increases in consumption among the white population, the only legislative action taken was to prohibit the supply of opium to Aborigines by a clause added to the 1891 'Sale and Use of Poisons Bill' as an afterthought. The Solicitor General, T.J. Byrnes, who had introduced the bill accepted the new clause, agreeing that the sale of opium to Aborigines was 'a crying evil, and had brought them down to the lowest depths of degradation, and was rapidly exterminating them'. As this was the almost unanimous opinion, there was little discussion of this protective measure. The subject had been raised in parliament before by a concerned few, and it was apparently believed that it would not harm any influential vested interest. The added clause forbade the supply of opium to any Aboriginal or half-caste or to any Pacific Islander except for medical reasons. For a first offence, a penalty not exceeding £10 or less than £2 was set and, for every subsequent offence, a penalty not exceeding £20 nor less than £5 plus costs.

122. ibid., Sol. Gen., in committee.  
123. Q.P.D. of L.A., LVIII, 1889, p. 1650, Paul directed Col. Sec's attention to the need to prevent supply of opium to Aborigines; Q.P.D. of L.A., LXIV, 1891, p. 769, Paul's motion for adjournment; Q.P.D. of L.C., LXIII, 1891, p. 206, A.J. Thynne, in committee, mentioned he had frequent complaints about Aborigines' use of opium in the previous three or four years.
in any case. Although there were a few successful prosecutions under the 1891 Act, it had virtually no effect in limiting the trade with Aborigines, a fact sufficiently indicated by the title of the 1897 'Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act'.

The opium almost invariably sold to the Aborigines was the opium ash or 'charcoal opium', that is the residue left after the opium has been initially smoked. It was widely believed that the ash was stronger and 'more demoralizing physically and mentally than the pure article'.

A qualified chemist of Bowen, A.B. Heron, declared that the 'absence of volatile oil and resin [in opium charcoal] would intensify the poisoning properties of opium'.

The alkaloid morphine is the most effective agent in opium and constitutes 10% by weight of the crude opium. An opium smoker absorbs not more than 1% of the morphine. As the opium charcoal contains 7% morphine, and was generally drunk, mixed in water, it is possible that more was absorbed by this method although there may have been unrecognized elements producing its toxicity. Thus Roth remarked:

124. 55 Vic. no. 31, clause 13.
125. P.D.T.: 14 May 1892, 'Bowen Police Court'; 15 April 1893, four Chinamen charged; 19 January 1895, one of two Chinese successfully charged; 16 March 1895, charge dropped through failure of witnesses to appear; 13 December 1897, two Chinese charged.
127. Evidence of A.B. Heron, Analytical Chemist, Member of the Pharmaceutical Society of Wales and Member of the Pharmaceutical Society of Australasia, and M.P.S. of Queensland, Q.S.A. CPS/115/65, p. 18.
129. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 16, p. 315. See Missionary Notes, 15 October 1897, p. 94, and Gribble, Forty Years with the Aborigines (Sydney, 1930), pp. 81, 82, for method of Aboriginal consumption of opium.
It is only the very lowest of the low Asiatics who will smoke this substance which is almost invariably put aside as currency for payment to aboriginals for procuration, work done etc. 130

Roth believed that if he could make the possession of charcoal opium a penal offence, he would prevent the Aborigines using opium as they would not be able to afford the raw opium. 131

Although it is true that the Chinese were the most important suppliers of opium to the Aborigines, Archibald Neston’s observation is accurate:

The Chinese are not the only criminals in this business, but so far they have been the scapegoats to carry the more prominent sins of the degrading traffic. White men whose position and reputation should be a guarantee at least of respect for the law, if not of a decent regard for the unfortunate aboriginal, supply the men with opium to induce them to work, and the women so that they may remain about the station. 132

Once again the most reliable evidence as to the extent of opium consumption among the Aborigines is revealed as a result of the appointment of protectors of Aborigines under the 1897 Legislation. However, two correspondents to the Queenslander in 1886 indicated that in some areas Aborigines refused to work for whites unless they were given opium. 133

In 1887, Inspector Stuart reported that in the

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131. Ibid.

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Rockhampton District where opium had been introduced by the Chinese in the previous few years the practice had spread with such rapidity, that the Aborigines were 'all more or less addicted [sic] to opium smoking'. In 1900, Sub Inspector Martin of Mackay reported: 'Most of the aboriginals are opium smokers, and will not work without it. I have good reason to believe that most of the settlers keep it for the purpose of getting work out of the blacks'. In the Townsville and Atherton Districts, Aborigines were reported to be obtaining opium from the Chinese. In his report for 1900, Roth concluded that the supply of opium to the Aborigines was continuing 'with unabated vigour' while the previous year he had stated that the practice was 'still prevalent'.

It is clear that opium was largely used, as Archibald Keaton had claimed, by both Chinese and whites to pay Aborigines for work done, for the prostitution of their women, or to keep them in employment. 'A Practical Man' had claimed he had to begin issuing opium to his Aborigines as his most valued employees left to work for his neighbours who gave them opium regularly. A station manager declared that when the Marsupial Bill was first passed, scalp hunters gathered a work force of Aborigines but found that unless they supplied opium they could not keep the group together so rather than lose a good thing, they supplied opium to the blacks in exchange for scalps'. It is necessary,

136. Ibid.
139. Queensland, 3 July 1886, p. 18, letter 'Opium Smoking in Queensland', signed 'Manager'. He was from an unnamed western station.
then, to look more closely at the role of the Chinese cooks and Chinese gardeners who along with the mailmen, were generally the source of opium on stations. Archibald Meston said they were often the scapegoats or agents allowed to provide opium to the Aborigines. Meston's son, Harold, commented to his father:

Any manager can put opium down on his own station if he so chooses, as it is nearly always supplied by the Chinese cook or gardener, and as one manager said to me 'If I had anyone on the place start to give my blacks opium I would soon sack him'.

The effects of opium upon the Aborigines were so obvious that one must agree with Harold Meston.

An early account of Aboriginal opium users claimed:

They dance, sing, shout, and fight until at last they sink down in a state of exhaustion and stupor, and dream a blissful dream which give the drug its influence and charm.

Other reports stressed that the Aborigines were not argumentative or likely to commit crimes when using opium and compared it favourably with the consequences of their consumption of alcohol which so often ended in 'frightful rows, generally ending in fights and sometimes murder'. All of the Aborigines interviewed in this research who had witnessed opium consumption stressed the blissful calm following its use in contrast to the effect of alcohol.


144. Interview with Mrs. Dolly Walker, Townsville, 20 August 1973. Interview with Mr. Harry Gertz, Valley of Lagoons Station, 14 October 1972. Interview with Mr. Pompey Clump-Point at Palm Island, 18 December 1972. Interview with Mr. Alf Palmer at Palm Island, 19 December 1972.
century evidence suggested strongly that once Aborigines began using opium they greatly preferred it to 'grog'.

Again, the old Aborigines interviewed agreed.

It is also clear that the consumption of opium had far greater effect on the Aborigines than on Chinese or Europeans.

Mr. Harry Gertz described how the Aborigines at the Valley of Lagoons near the turn of the century used to sit in a close circle passing around a billy can containing opium ash dissolved in water until they collapsed into a stupor. His own mother had died from opium poisoning.

In 1884 a resident of Bowen wrote:

> I have seen another district in the North in which the blacks have been supplied by a publican with opium at a charge of one shilling a smoke; this habit when once acquired they cannot shake off. They will travel for days in order to obtain their opium, no inducement will keep them away from it and they may be seen in numbers lying about in a state of stupefaction.

The demoralizing and debilitating effects of drug abuse were also clearly described. A police constable stationed at Townsville in 1898 wrote of his experience among the Aborigines of the lower Herbert:

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146. See f.n. 144 above.

147. Interview with Mr. Harry Gertz at the Valley of Lagoons Station, 14 October 1972.

148. P.D.T., 19 January 1884, letter signed 'A Resident'.
the Constable has seen fine, healthy, good working gins travel to the Seymour and in a short time would come back perfect wrecks and useless simply from the use of opium. 149

A German Professor, Klaatsch, who was a doctor of medicine reported in 1905 that opium was fast killing the Aborigines around Bellenden Ker and reported:

the younger aboriginals in districts where opium holds sway have no means the same physique as the older generations had. The women folk too, have deteriorated and the opium is going a long way to assist in the extinction of the race. 150

Roth had earlier claimed that the opium was 'exerting a far more baneful influence on the aboriginal than even liquor and venereal disease'. 151 Other statements by members of parliament indicated acceptance of the idea that opium was the prime cause of death among Aborigines. 152

There were no doubt some cases of acute opium poisoning due to Aborigines' taking a larger dose of opium than their system could tolerate and many cases of chronic poisoning from habitual over-indulgence. An authority on this subject noted:

Habitual use of opium produces physical, mental and moral deterioration, proportionate to the dose taken. Those taking small doses such as one to three grains

149. Constable Holmes, Townsville, to Insp. Fitzgerald, Townsville, 3 April 1898, encl. Q.S.A. COL/143, 11354 of 1899.


151. Roth, N.P.A., to Under Sec., Home Dept., 7 September 1900, encl. Q.S.A. COL/143, 14266 of 1900. For similar claims see also Bulletin 1901 [only date retained], Bertie Newspaper Cutting Book, 68, (N.L.); Gribble, Forty Years with the Aborigines, pp. 31, 52, 84; R. Meston, Whitula, to A. Meston, S.P.A., 23 February 1903, encl. Q.S.A. COL/144, 4721 of 1903.

152. Q.P.D. of L.C., LXIII, 1891, p. 206, F.W. Taylor, in committee; Q.P.D. of L.C., LXIII, 1891, p. 109, A.J. Thynne, in second reading. Both were speaking in the debate on the 'Sale and Use of Poisons Bill'.

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149. Constable Holmes, Townsville, to Insp. Fitzgerald, Townsville, 3 April 1898, encl. Q.S.A. COL/143, 11354 of 1899.


151. Roth, N.P.A., to Under Sec., Home Dept., 7 September 1900, encl. Q.S.A. COL/143, 14266 of 1900. For similar claims see also Bulletin 1901 [only date retained], Bertie Newspaper Cutting Book, 68, (N.L.); Gribble, Forty Years with the Aborigines, pp. 31, 52, 84; R. Meston, Whitula, to A. Meston, S.P.A., 23 February 1903, encl. Q.S.A. COL/144, 4721 of 1903.

152. Q.P.D. of L.C., LXIII, 1891, p. 206, F.W. Taylor, in committee; Q.P.D. of L.C., LXIII, 1891, p. 109, A.J. Thynne, in second reading. Both were speaking in the debate on the 'Sale and Use of Poisons Bill'.
daily show no apparent signs of the dulling of physical and mental faculties or the chronic toxemia that are marked effects of larger doses ... In the case of the Indians, excessive indulgence seriously damaged health, caused loss of physical energy and deterioration of intellect and so reduced earning capacity and shortened life. 153

This should be compared with the description by Inspector Stuart of the Aborigines of the Rockhampton District.

Stuart was an able, intelligent officer who had previously served in North Queensland. He reported:

The use of the drug has a very marked effect on them. They get emaciated and lazy. As long as they can procure a pipe of opium they will remain in camp in a dreamy condition and will make no attempt to get themselves food — compared with drink it has quite the opposite effect on them. They lose all their animal spirits and become lethargic in their natural disposition. Opium smoking produces no tendency among them to crime. I have never known a blackfellow commit an offence when under its influence. 154

The extremely large amount of charcoal opium available, the need of Aboriginal labour, the desire to prostitute their women, and the opportunity to make large profits by the sale of the dross were other factors that support the conclusion that many Aborigines were suffering from chronic opium poisoning. 155

There must have been many more instances where the consumption of opium or alcohol was simply one factor, and not necessarily the most important, in the ill health of the individual or the community. For these debilitating

had resulted as well from introduced diseases, subnutrition, and the health destroying environment the colonists had directly or indirectly created. Opium and alcohol probably made Aborigines less resistant to disease. For many more, consumption of alcohol and opium were adaptive mechanisms that allowed them to cope with an otherwise unbearable life. Much of the traditional life that was dignified and gave status, security and satisfaction had been swept away: much that was exciting and interesting had faded. The conquest and slaughter of friends and relatives were still remembered as were the deaths from unknown diseases and epidemics that were not explained or assuaged convincingly by traditional lore. The consequences of disease, malnutrition, and unhygienic conditions were incomprehensibly present. If traditional life was much greyer in the pacified areas, it is not difficult to understand why Aborigines turned to alcohol, opium, and tobacco for satisfaction. 156

In their stressful new life that began after the conquest was accepted, they found satisfaction in the readily available drugs of the conquerors and were willing to change much of their life style to obtain them. That these drugs often produced regrettable consequences should not obscure the positive functions they fulfilled in Aboriginal society.

156. The fact that over large areas of western Queensland Aborigines had traditionally used a narcotic, pituri, which contained a nicotine alkoloid, was largely irrelevant to their new circumstances as its supply had always been limited and its use socially controlled. See Queenslander, 3 July 1886, p. 18, 'Pituri' signed C. Twisdem-Bedford, Pituri Creek, Georgina River. Pituri is the leaf of the duboisia hopwoodii. See T. Harvey Johnston and J. Burton Cleland, 'The History of the Aboriginal Narcotic, Pituri', Oceania, 4 (1933), pp. 201-223, and (1934), pp. 268-289; and G. Aiston, 'The Aboriginal Narcotic Pitcheri', Oceania, 7 (1937), pp. 372-377.
as Beckett has pointed out with respect to alcohol in an Aboriginal community. 157

* * * *

Opium and alcohol were part of a complex of factors leading to a dramatic decline in population although it is difficult to suggest how dramatic or to determine which factor was most destructive. The difficulty begins with an estimate of the pre-contact population. The Aboriginal population of North Queensland has been previously estimated at between 61,000 and 76,000. 158 By the end of the nineteenth century, Roth, the first Northern Protector of Aborigines, and Meston, the first Southern Protector of Aborigines, had made various official estimates of the Aboriginal population of North Queensland ranging from more than 25,000 to 15,000. The most probable figure was a maximum of 15,000 in 1900. 159 Thus the original population of between 61,000 and 76,000 had been reduced to approximately 15,000 between 1861 and 1900 i.e. to between one-quarter and one-fifth. However, this overall figure gives a misleadingly high estimate for most of North Queensland as there were probably 10,000 of the approximately 15,000 living in Cape York Peninsula where the tribes, in large areas, had been reduced to nowhere near the above extent. 160

157. Beckett, 'Aborigines, Alcohol, and Assimilation', passim, especially the conclusions on p. 46.
159. See Appendix F. Meston had officially investigated the condition of the Aborigines of North Queensland in 1896.
It is possible to look at some local estimates to test the validity of this conclusion. There are numerous reports of blanket distributions but these are a doubtful indicator. The policy for distributing blankets varied and not all Aborigines received them. As well, a report of blanket distribution often does not indicate from precisely what area the Aborigines were drawn or whether there were other smaller distributions on outlying centres. However, from the records of the *Port Denison Times* which regularly reported the blanket distribution the largest recorded number of Aborigines attending the distribution was 250 in 1878161 while the lowest number reported was 40 in 1895.2 This certainly indicates a dramatic decline in the numbers of Aborigines in the near neighbourhood of Bowen and this is supported by such newspaper commentary as:

> The race is gradually dying out and in a short time will be extinct, certainly in this district, as only about forty put in an appearance on Wednesday and poor miserable creatures they were, many of whom it was evident would not ask for Her Majesty's donation again. 163

The depopulation at Mackay as indicated by a census taken in 1886 (60 for Mackay Census District) is just as marked and supported by the experience of the Mari Yamba missionaries who, inter alia, lacked a sufficient Aboriginal population to justify a mission.164 Radcliffe-Brown had estimated an original population of one person to six square miles

161. *P.D.T.*, 25 May 1878. Obviously by 1878 there had already been great depopulation. Aborigines had probably been attracted to Bowen from distant areas. The figures can only indicate those who went to Bowen to receive blankets.

162. *P.D.T.*, 4 May 1895.

163. Ibid. See also *P.D.T.*: 4 May 1899; 2 May 1891: about fifty; 11 November 1893: 'a blackfellow being as scarce as a black swan in these parts'; 5 May 1894.

164. See Appendix F.
for the Mackay District within a radius of about fifty miles. On Tindale's map this encompasses the whole of the Juipera tribe; some, possibly a local group, of the Wirri tribe, and possibly some of the Ngaro tribe \(^{166}\) as Bridgman, upon whom Radcliffe-Brown had based his estimates, describes one group, the Googaburra, as 'Island Blacks'. \(^{167}\) These could have been attracted to Mackay. On Radcliffe-Brown's estimate, excluding 'Island Blacks', there would have been a population of 650. \(^{168}\) Thus presumably at Mackay the Aboriginal population had been reduced by 90% from the early 1860's to 1886.

Curr received the information from his informants for North Queensland mainly in the early 1880's. (See Table VI). Although it is impossible to judge their accuracy, it is informative to look at contemporary estimates by people who most often were in the best position to know - experienced pastoralists, police officers, and other government officials. It is also useful to note their assessment of the major causes of depopulation remembering that they would probably have been unaware of the less obvious factors such as infertility, subnutrition, unsuitable hygiene for the new high density, and often largely static, living conditions. Many areas were not accounted for and many informants did not comment on depopulation or the causes of it. However, it is clear that contemporary observers who did comment agreed that between first contact and

\(^{165}\) Radcliffe-Brown, 'Former Numbers and Distribution of Australian Aborigines', p. 694.
\(^{166}\) Tindale map: Aboriginal Tribes of Australia.
\(^{167}\) Curr, Australian Race, Vol. III, p. 44.
\(^{168}\) Area of a semicircle of 50 miles radius = \(\frac{1}{2}\pi r^2 = 3,930\) sq. miles. With Radcliffe Brown's estimate of one Aboriginal to six square miles this results in 655 Aborigines.
and about 1880 there had been marked depopulation of more than 50%. It is interesting to note that such informants registered attacks by the Native Police or settlers as among the main factors in depopulation fifteen times, venereal disease seven times, and other factors seven times. In the thirteen times that attempts were made to assign a cause, settler attacks were mentioned nine times and Native Police six times. Diseases of all kind are referred to eleven out of thirteen times, settler or Native Police violence eleven times. The importance of disease in depopulation scarcely needs stating. The importance of frontier conflict can easily be overlooked and regarded as important only in certain notorious cases such as at Burkettown when fifty-nine Aborigines were killed in one Native Police action — thirty for killing several horses and twenty-nine for killing a settler. Curr's informants attest to the severity of frontier conflict. The opinion of other settlers could be given ad nauseam. Thus J. Hamilton, M.L.A., was informed by a settler whom he respected that the colonists had 'shot about half the aboriginals that were in the country'. This seems an over-estimate but Hamilton forwarded the letter without qualification to Colonial Secretary Tozer who acknowledged the advice given.

169. The exception was the Burke River area around Boulia. To some extent this may have been accounted for by an overestimate elsewhere of the original population although such informants as Palmer, Bridgman, and Chatfield were among the most interested in Aborigines in Queensland at that time and the police officers and government officials were experienced frontiersmen whose names have been repeatedly met in this study. See Curr, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 346.

170. John Atherton's comment is taken as referring to both settlers and Native Police which seems a reasonable conclusion. See Curr, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 408-409.

171. P.D.T., 4 June 1868.

172. /Unknown settler/to Hamilton, 8 August 1894, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, 13850 of 1894. The last page(s) are missing. The letter was sent from Geraldton (Innisfail).
### TABLE VI

**SUMMARY OF CURR’S ESTIMATE OF DEPOPULATION IN NORTH QUEENSLAND**

*From E.M. Curr, *The Australian Race, Vols II and III*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Bay</td>
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<td>C</td>
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<td>Lung Disease</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Measles</td>
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<td>V.D.</td>
<td>Venereal Disease</td>
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<td>Vol. Page</td>
<td>Locality</td>
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<tr>
<td>419-9</td>
<td>Minchinbrook Is. Adjacent mainland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>424-8</td>
<td>Halifax R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>432-3</td>
<td>Headwaters of Burdekin R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>449</td>
<td>Mt. Elliott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>464-5</td>
<td>Watershed and Upper Cape R. (100 sq. miles).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>468-74</td>
<td>Natal Downs Station, Cape R. (10,000 sq. miles).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III 18-23</td>
<td>Main Rn. Between Belyando and Cape R.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-7</td>
<td>Logan Rn. Part of lower Sutter and of Lower Mistake Rn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44-7</td>
<td>Port Mackay and neighbourhood.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and did not comment on the estimate.

It would probably be cowardly not to make an informed guess at the number of Aborigines who were killed in frontier conflict in North Queensland between 1861 and 1897. Appendix B gives details of over 400, Europeans, Chinese, or their employees, who were believed killed by Aborigines during the period of frontier conflict or after it in situations that indicated Aboriginal resistance or a reassertion of Aboriginal independence. Remembering that many Aborigines were killed for theft, killing, stock, disturbing stock, or merely being feared - probably more than for killing colonists - it does not seem an exaggeration to suggest that at least ten Aborigines died for every one killed by Aborigines.

Indeed, it seems very conservative to think that an average of 110 Aborigines were killed each year between 1861 and 1897 when one considers the Native Police detachments constantly on patrol throughout the year and the fact that, even in 1897, a defensive Police Commissioner had admitted 'the force has apparently confined its operations to the retaliatory action after the occurrence of outrages, and seems to have dropped all idea of employing merely deterrent or conciliatory methods; but I intend to change all that'.

If one also considers that the colonists were effectively unrestrained in their use of force throughout this period, 4,000 seems extremely cautious.

Another factor that must be further considered is infanticide. In only two areas of North Queensland did Curr's informants claim that infanticide had increased greatly since contact with the colonists. (See Table VI). It is probable that they underestimated this factor: firstly because it is not an act easy to detect; secondly, because

many acts termed cannibalism were probably associated with infanticide. It is not difficult to understand that many Aborigines would not wish children to share their new life or be able to support them. Thus as early as 1877 there was a report that Aborigines in the Bowen District were practising infanticide. However, the missionaries, as a result of their concern for and close contacts with the Aborigines, gave some of the best specific examples. Nicholas Hey of Mapoon reported that three young Aboriginal women who were engaged on boats along with their husbands killed their infants: possibly because it would have been difficult to rear them in the fisheries; because they did not want to bring children into such a life; or because their employers brought pressure to bear on them. In 1895, Gribble of Yarrabah learned of half-caste babies being killed at birth. He claimed that infanticide was condemned by most Aborigines and only done in cases of deformity or when the children were half-caste. In 1897, a missionary at Mari Yamba reported not only the small number of children but the disproportion in the sexes along the Proserpine and Don Rivers. Among twenty adults he would normally find only about five women. He added:

This is explained by the fact that mothers kill the newborn of their own sex. Sometimes they even eat them. Hence the staggeringly small number of children.

From such limited reports, one can only suggest that

175. P.D.T., 12 May 1877.
176. N. Hey, Mapoon Mission Station, to Home Sec., 1 July 1898, encl. 'Report of the Commissioner of Police ...', 1898 V. & P., Vol. IV, p. 505. See also M.H. Ward, Diary 1895, entry 13 October 1897 (M.L. MSS 1893, carton no. 4). Hey thought the fishermen were responsible.
177. M.N., 15 May 1895, p. 84.
infanticide was possibly an important factor in depopulation but probably less important than infertility arising from disease and maternal debilitation.

Such a disproportion in the sexes was reported as widely occurring by Bennett in *Christison of Lammermoor* where she attributed it to the fact that the girls and young women were taken away from the camps by white men.\(^{179}\) When the Aborigines were first let in there was normally a noticeably smaller number of men because of the frontier conflict.\(^ {180}\) Curr's informants for North Queensland who broke down the population to its sexual component indicated six areas where women significantly outnumbered men and one where the reverse situation existed. (See Table VI). Yet, for example, the survey of the Cloncurry District in 1899 reveals 92 adult males to 76 females,\(^ {181}\) and the return for 1900 revealing the sex of those receiving blankets north of the 22nd parallel shows 2,615 men to 2,344 women.\(^ {182}\) These blankets were not given out to Aborigines living a traditional life away from settled areas. It is impossible to estimate how representative this figure is but it does suggest that the initial imbalance in the sexes had been overcompensated for by the end of the century by a wastage of females, possibly through disproportionately large female infanticide, through Aboriginal women being taken from their Aboriginal environment, as

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180. See Curr, *Australian Race*, Vol. II, pp. 470-471. See also Table VI.

181. Sgt. H. Green, Cloncurry, to Insp. Lamond, Normanton, 3 June 1899, Q.S.A. COL/14B/16, 58 of 1899.

Bennett indicated, and possibly through an increase in maternal deaths at childbirth resulting from debilitation.

It must be stressed that the previous estimates are tentative and based on figures whose accuracy is unsubstantiated. However, from whatever cause, nearly all population estimates reveal a great dearth of children. There are other convincing reports besides Curr's. (See Table VI). In the Townsville District, in 1885, 214 adults arrived to collect blankets and only 65 children; at Georgetown in 1886, there were 110 adults to 20 children; and indeed, in 1900 north of the 22nd parallel, 4,959 adults received blankets compared with 383 children. The subsequent protective legislation has to be seen against these facts which strongly supported the thesis of a doomed race.

All through the settled parts of North Queensland Aborigines survived the onslaught of conquest, disease, the temptations of opium, alcohol, and tobacco, the prostitution of their women, and the kidnapping or enticing away of men, women and children from their local groups. The traditional Aboriginal life had been changed utterly in North Queensland except for extensive areas of Cape York Peninsula. The changes had not all been forced on the Aborigines. It is impossible to survey the evidence of the nineteenth century in North Queensland without being astounded at the speed with which Aborigines adopted and adapted many aspects of the colonists' culture.

Some of these modifications must have seemed unimportant to the Aborigines. They did not seem to change basically their way of life. Thus the use of steel axes, clothes,

183. N.Q.T., 16 May 1885.
184. P.M., Georgetown, to Under Col. Sec., 3 April 1883, G.S.A. COL/A359, 2018 of 1883.
metal containers, metal implements, glass, and the satisfaction of the colonists' sexual needs fitted into their conceptual framework. They were no doubt surprised to find they had caused major changes in their work habits and the availability of increased leisure time, and in their kinship obligations, trade patterns, and religious beliefs and practices. Other accepted changes were obviously basic and modified greatly their way of life. Thus large numbers worked voluntarily with the fishermen, leaving for varying periods of time the religious and social security of their homelands. Very large numbers incorporated towns, missions, farms, mining camps, or stations into their changed life style for varying periods of time. Some elected completely for the life the colonists could offer and became police mercenaries; some attached themselves to missions; some like Alick Bybee and John Menmanny Barlow of Yarrabah became Christian evangelists; many others took employment on stations. A few examples only must illustrate the variety of accommodation.

There were of course Aborigines who elected to stay near, and in reality become part of, white settlements even though this meant dissociating themselves from their own people. Thus, the Maytown correspondent informed the Cooktown Courier at the time of still uneasy peaceful co-existence that most of the Aborigines were departing from the town for the Normanby 'leaving as mementos the slip-slop of the tribe; hangers on of the whites who employ them regardless of the paucity of shirt and the total absence of delicacy'. However, as well as fringe dwellers

186. Sharpe, Steel Axes for Stone Age Australians, pp.74-90. 187. C.C., 27 July 1888, 'Maytown Notes'. Apparently some time after this there was conflict which resulted in some or all Aborigines being kept out of Maytown as the Queenslander, 8 March 1890, p. 438, describes the Aborigines being let in to Maytown.
of towns, stations, etc. there were large numbers of Aborigines and part Aborigines who had been taken into European homes as concubines and as children. Such children were then often discouraged or prevented from having contacts with the camp Aborigines. Some of these soon felt alienated from their own race and saw themselves as occupying a privileged, comfortable position. Many were no doubt treated badly but often they grew up with their European guardian's children, ate the same food, were clothed and given a horse to ride, a rifle to use, and even sometimes provided with a smattering of education. 188 Weston accurately describes this situation:

Kidnapping of boys and girls is another serious evil. Both have been the causes of many murders and many crimes very little better than murder. Boys and girls are frequently taken from their parents and their tribes, and removed far off whence they have no chance of returning; left helpless at the mercy of those who possess them, white people responsible to no one and under no supervision by any authority.

Some are admirably treated, and others are badly used. ... Scattered all over Queensland are aboriginal boys and girls, or grown men and women, in the service of people for whom they have been obtained by various means, honest and otherwise. 189

188. Interview with Mr. Alf Palmer at Palm Island, 19 December 1972: born 1891, lived in the station house at Kangaroo Hills for about ten years. Interview with Mrs. Iris Clay, at Palm Island, 19 December 1972, re life and experiences of Mrs. Clay's mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Fulford and her family. Mrs. Fulford's mother was a full-blood Kokoimudji. A subsequent interview with Mrs. Fulford, 26 December 1972, confirmed the first interview and added to it. Interviews with Mr. Dick Hoolihan, 8 April 1972, and 14 April 1972: born 7 February 1907. Mr. Hoolihan experienced this privileged status in the early twentieth century. Interview with Mr. Harry Gertz at Valley of Lagoons Station, 14 October 1972: estimated to be 84 or 86 years of age.

Aboriginal Children Taken into Settlers' Homes. (N.L.).
As is obvious, and as Heston pointed out, these Aborigines were often removed from any meaningful society in which they could have a satisfactory life. There were often serious problems associated with the possibility of marriage and rearing a family especially for the numerous women who were employed as domestics or nursemaids. They were easily exploited by Europeans, Chinese and Pacific Islanders.  

The conflicting forces acting on many Aboriginal groups trying to live a modified traditional life is brought out clearly in a reported pidgin conversation which took place in 1895 between a settler and a group of Aborigines traditionally occupying the tract of country south of the Annan River, near Cooktown, and running along the coast for about twenty miles and extending inland for about six or seven miles (a northern local group of the Jhungkurara tribe). This group had 'dwindled away' greatly. There were two old men, one ill young man, seven old women, four young women, three or four little girls, three of four little boys, and a baby. Two little children had just been buried. Most of the able bodied men of the tribe were absent at the beche-de-mer fisheries. The group had been at Cooktown but could not get enough food there to subsist.

They had no food with the exception of half a loaf of bread and a big lump of beef they had brought from Cooktown... The poor creatures had all got colds, water was running from their noses, and they complained very much of too little 'ki-ki' and 'too much cold long a night'. I asked them why they did not go into the bush and kill 'possums, etc., and dig yams. They

190. ibid. Indeed, the sociological situation in North Queensland with its predominantly male European population, and almost exclusively male Pacific Islander, and Chinese populations associated with deeply disturbed Aboriginal population is deserving of further study than this research allows.
replied, 'White fellow along, a yarraman [horse], too much break him spear, burn yambo, cut him old man with whip; white man too much kill him kangaroo, old man.' I asked them why not go to the North Shore Mission Station [Hope Valley]? They answered, 'Too much fight another tribe [Kokoimudji], no good.' I said, 'I think Bloomfield [Mission] very good,' but they said 'Normanby tribe [possibly Wulpura] too much fight Bloomfield too much long way. We like our own country; only white man no good.' The young gins said, 'I think altogether we die soon; pig-pig eat him yams; plum fall down, wild pig too much eat.'

This group was conquered, depopulated, diseased, and malnourished. They had tried to find sustenance in the town and at two missions over fifty miles apart despite their intense attachment to their land. Their food supplies were drastically curtailed by pigs, the settlers, and groups of more powerful Aborigines preventing them from sharing the largesse of the missions. These Aborigines would soon cease to exist as a community like so many others previously.

Finally, the commonest situation was possibly represented by developments within the Cloncurry District, near the turn of the century. Here, the remnants of three separate tribes, the Kalkadunga, the Maithakari, and the Wanamara, had intermingled and were hunting in small groups as one tribe and sharing their food. Their new tribal district was an area within a radius of about one hundred miles of Cloncurry, encompassing all of the Kalkadunga and Maithakari tribal areas and about half of the much larger Wanamara tribal area.


192. Tindale map: Aboriginal Tribes of Australia. The tribal groups given by the informant below have been matched with Tindale's. See Sgt. M. Green, Cloncurry, to Insp. Lamond, Normanton, 3 June 1899, Q.S.A. POL/14B/15, 58 of 1899. The tribal names given were Kalcadoon, Myduthidy, and Unamurra.
This bush 'tribe' then consisted of about 20 male and 31 female adult Kalkadunga and 12 children; eight male and 12 female adult Maithakari and two children; four male and 17 female adult Wanamara and two children. There were thus 108 Aborigines (32 men, 60 women, and 16 children) living a modified tribal life throughout an area of over thirty thousand square miles. Forty of the adults were declared to be in 'bad' physical condition. Because of the dry state of the country, pastoralists would not allow them to hunt near the water holes as they disturbed the stock gathered there in large numbers. In winter, natural food was limited and, as the stations could always give some of them odd jobs, some took casual employment to supplement the small horde's food supply. Members of the same tribes were permanently employed on the stations and they, too, provided food for the nomadic Aborigines. No doubt kinship ties, greatly modified by this tribal fusion, linked the nomadic group with the station Aborigines. It is likely that dependence on obtaining food from the stations caused the Aborigines to move in such small hordes.193 There were 30 male and eight female adult Kalkadunga, 24 male and eight female adult Maithakari, and six male adult Wanamara working permanently on the stations in this district but surprisingly no children — possibly because the first children taken into the stations had just become the adults of this survey. The 76 'station blacks' were said to be in 'good' physical condition. Thus, 184 members of the three tribes had actively reached an accommodation with the

193. Green to Lamond, 3 June 1899, above.
intruders. 194

In 1897, Walter Roth produced his famous *Ethnological Studies Among the North-West-Central Aborigines*, the result of three years' residence as medical officer to the Boulia, Cloncurry, and Normanton hospitals. 195 Roth noted some of the changes that had occurred among the nomadic Aborigines of this area. Stone knives and stone tomahawks had been replaced by iron obtained from disused shear blades and barrel hoops which they filed and ground down while the handles had been modified to suit the new implements. 196 Another change reported by Roth of the north-west-central Queensland Aborigines was one that was rarely recorded: the decline of religious life. Roth described what he called four 'degrees of Social Rank'. They were, in effect, four stages in the initiation process at which the initiates were introduced progressively to the deeper knowledge and mysteries of Aboriginal life. Roth had encountered the usual difficulties in persuading the Aborigines to impart such sacred information but found that the simple fact of depopulation had robbed members of the tribe of much religious knowledge and ritual. As he wrote:

with the gradual depletion of the aboriginal population, the initiation ceremonies of the higher ranks are gradually becoming obsolete, those for the females especially being already very marked; that individuals belonging to the higher grades and consequently older

194. ibid. See map accompanying 'Report on the North Queensland Aborigines and the Native Police', *1897 V. & P.*, Vol. II, following p. 46. It was estimated that there were 150 'Kalkadoon' and 150 'Mittaordo' with no estimate for 'Woonamarra'. This may indicate a great population decline but more likely indicates an inadequate survey in the period before the 1897 Protection legislation. As well, this map's tribal boundaries are very different from Tindale's.


196. Ibid., p. 151.
people are not too commonly met with; and that no one is allowed to be present or to assist in the initiation of any degree higher than that of which he is himself a member. 197

Before an individual could pass to the next stage, he himself had to learn all the duties associated with initiating others to his degree, until he was 'the leader, chief director, or master of ceremonies appertaining to his degree' after which he and, perhaps, the two or three others of his degree who had achieved full knowledge would be initiated into the next stage. Thus religious knowledge and ritual were very vulnerable to depopulation or the attraction of tribal members out of the locality to work for colonists.

Roth also recorded for this district another common Aboriginal reaction to the intrusion of a dominating alien culture. The authority of the elders was greatly diminished as many of the young were confronted with the fact that traditional knowledge and authority were no longer able to explain and master, or at least live in harmony with, the new environment in which European power and authority was the overriding reality. In the Cloncurry District Roth met 'an appreciable number of Pitta-Pitta and other Soutia District males who admittedly had left their own tribe on this account [to escape subincision].' 199 Roth states that one way of escaping subincision was to seek protection by working for Europeans. 200 There is evidence to suggest that, for many young Aborigines, the wish to avoid such

197. ibid., p. 169. By 'the females especially very marked', Roth means that there is a very marked decline in the initiation rites for females. Roth adds that Europeans - who no doubt believed and claimed that they had witnesses all - were only permitted to view the first and second initiation ceremonies.
198. ibid.
199. ibid., p. 178.
mutilations as subincision or tooth avulsion led them to alienate themselves from their tribal group. Yet the decision and the efforts made were often only the focal point of the much larger problem of rejecting traditional Aboriginal authority and much of its religious sanction. 201

This was brought out very clearly in the first interview between three Aborigines at Mapoon, Chitagah, 'Dick', and 'Bos'n', and the incoming Missionaries. The Captain of the boat that had brought the missionaries noticed that unlike other Mapoon Aborigines, 'Bos'n' had a full set of teeth:

"'Where you belong?'

"'Where you belong here,' said Bos'n.

"'No, you no belong here,' said the Captain.

"'Yes,' said Bos'n.

"'What have you done with your teeth?' said the captain, sarcastically pointing to Bos'n's full set of teeth, whilst the others showed two of the top row missing, it being a custom to knock out the teeth with a hammer at a certain age. Poor Bos'n was either too bashful to speak, or his vocabulary failed him under this unexpected attack. But Chitagah came to his rescue and said, 'He no like it - and dat no use.'" 202

There are numerous other examples where traditional Aboriginal society had changed utterly but where Aborigines, often confronting immense difficulties and hardships, actively, energetically, and even desperately sought to adapt to their new circumstances. Depopulation, disease, and the use of tension-relieving drugs like alcohol, tobacco, and opium have masked the fact that, up until 1897, Aborigines

201. Interviews with Mr. Dick Hoolihan, loc. cit; interview with Mr. Harry Gertz, loc. cit; interview with Mr. Joe Garbutt, loc. cit; Trezise, Quinkan Country, p. 85; C.J. Henry, Girroo Gurrli: The First Surveyor and other Aboriginal Legends (Brisbane, 1967), p. 62.

202. 'The Most Hopeful Incident As Yet', Periodical Accounts, March 1892, pp. 479, 480. This is an extract from a letter of the Rev. J. Ward (M.L. MSS 1893, carton no. 4).
were functioning in a great variety of ways within a hostile environment changed against their will. 203

There can be no doubt that such attempts to adapt to the new and varied situations the Aborigines found themselves in were accompanied by much personal stress as attitudes towards aboriginal society and western society conflicted, as recent cross-cultural research has indicated. 204 The amalgam of hostility against and attraction towards aspects of western society inevitably posed a multitude of choices and decisions that had not arisen previously. As Moodie has pointed out, even the freedom to choose produces stress in those ill-equipped to make the choice, especially if the choice has wide significance and repercussions. 205 The choices confronting nineteenth century Aborigines were probably as important as any ever posed to human beings. The necessity to adapt to changed circumstances in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was undoubtedly the most severe challenge faced by Aborigines in their thirty or forty

203. For other examples of Aborigines adapting to changed circumstances, see Roth, N.P.A., Cooktown, to Pol. Com., 6 June 1898, encl. Q.S.A. COL/139, [Typed copy], for a variety of types of accommodation but especially for a fusion of two diminished previously discrete groups (p. 3) with a reduced foraging area; Lumboltz, Among Cannibals, pp. 335-6; 'Expedition in Search of Gold in the Palmer District by Mulligan and Party', 1876 V. & P., p. 416; R.L. Jack, 'Report of Explorations in Cape York Peninsula, 1879-80', 1881 V. & P., Vol. II, p. 239; the last three references indicate changes in the material culture of Aborigines with some ingenious adaptation; 'Report on the Aboriginals of Queensland', 1896 V. & P., Vol. IV, p. 733: thirty Aboriginal representatives of three different 'tribes' camped together two miles from Thornborough.


205. Moodie, Aboriginal Health, p. 197.
millenia in the continent notwithstanding the fact that they had experienced major climatic changes, changes in fauna and flora, rising and falling sea levels, volcanic eruptions, important changes in their technology, and extensive contact with at least the Macassans and the Torres Strait Islanders.  

It is important to stress the response of the Aborigines, living in a variety of Aboriginal cultures, to the new situation. Many of the features of this response have indicated the, often dramatic, breakdown of traditional Aboriginal life and have also been associated with various features, distasteful to European observers - such as the consumption of alcohol and opium, the breakdown in family life, and the loss of much of tribal law and morals. This has led even relatively recent European observers to view Aborigines as not necessarily a doomed race but as a doomed society to be described in such negatives as 'intelligent parasitism' and 'the notorious stability of Australian cultures under Aboriginal conditions' and the 'destruction of Aboriginal society'.

We can now see that an Aboriginal culture exists although greatly changed and diversified. In much of North Queensland, indeed throughout Australia, it is not even traditionally orientated. Moodie's comment on European analyses of the mental health of Aborigines should be noted:

In looking at the pattern of mental health in Aboriginal communities, the tendency has been to regard Aboriginal stereotyped behaviour patterns such as heavy drinking, 'apathy', Elkin's 'intelligent parasitism' or Christophers' 'institutional neurosis' as symptomatic of mental illhealth rather than as suitable adaptive mechanism integrated with other more positive Aboriginal

This is obviously most relevant to an understanding of nineteenth century Aboriginal reactions. While it would be presumptuous to attempt psychological analyses of nineteenth century Aborigines from this vantage point with the totally inadequate data available, the work of Cawte and his colleagues at the University of New South Wales can suggest the variety of Aboriginal reactions to the stress of culture-clash. Cawte found among the Kiadilt - since 1948 of Mornington Island, previously of Bentinck Island - a high degree of social disintegration and mental illness. The Kiadilt had only had significant contact after World War II but, 'By comparison with other tribes in the region there was a high incidence of physical disease also'.

Cawte believed that bad seasons had followed a series of good years - 'fluctuating abundance' - when the population had increased and a struggle for survival ensued which led to increased feuding, social disintegration, and a high incidence of mental and physical illness. His conclusion is obviously relevant to the nineteenth century: 'an unsatisfactory human ecology is capable of producing social fragmentation that begets mental disturbance that begets more social fragmentation, in a downward spiral of malfunctioning'.

208. Moodie, Aboriginal Health, p. 196.
210. Ibid. See J.E. Cawte, 'A Cruel, Poor and Brutal Nation', in I. Filowsky (ed.), Psychiatry and the Community (Sydney, 1969), pp. 134-147, for a detailed analysis of this research and J.E. Cawte, Cruel, Poor and Brutal Nations: the Assessment of Mental Health in an Australian Aboriginal Community by Short-Stay Psychiatric Methods (Honolulu, 1972), passim, for a more wide-ranging investigation of the Kiadilt and 'Mainlanders' on Mornington Island.
unrealized disturbing factor among other uncontacted Aboriginal communities prior to and, like the Kiadilt, after the European colonization of North Queensland. However, it is likely that the period of two to ten years—sometimes up to twenty—when the Aborigines were 'kept out' created similar difficulty in achieving a subsistence and a similar or greater fear of attack and death. The effect on the children being hunted from lands that their group had never conceived as being other than sacredly their own and seeing their parents or relatives shot down, and their mothers or women and other children kidnapped must have produced a generation with very different personalities and outlooks from those before contact.

Indeed, even in pacified areas the Aborigines were often deprived of an adequate subsistence which probably produced similar socially disintegrating tensions. Those Aborigines who could not or would not pursue a traditional style of life were then subjected, much more than the Lardil of Mornington Island, to seeking a place in an economy which had no power to 'motivate, inspire, and organize Aboriginal existence'.

During the period of this research, in different parts of North Queensland one, two, or three generations of Aborigines grew up experiencing a variety of contact situations. In the Kennedy District, the young Aboriginal and part Aboriginal children of 1897 may have been two generations from the conquest by colonists and have been the inheritors of up to three generations of being fringe dwellers, 'station blacks', or seasonal employees of white men. Mr. Pompey Clump-Point, now of Palm Island, was born at Green Island near Cairns, probably in the 1880's, while his parents were working for beche-de-mer boats, as did Pompey. He

211. Cavte, 'Cruel, Poor and Brutal Nation', in Pilowsky, op. cit., p. 16.
also worked as a farm labourer for the Cuttens at Clump Point yet was initiated and obviously strongly influenced by the modified tribal culture he was born into. Among the Walbiri tribe in Central Australia, Cawte and Kidson examined thirty members of three generations and concluded 'that there was an evolution of character and character disorders taking place as a result of the contact situation and a changing ecology'. If this is true of the comparatively sheltered Walbiri, it is no doubt true of the Aborigines in North Queensland.

After years of research into transcultural psychiatry among Aborigines in a variety of contact situations, Cawte concluded:

Indeed of all the changes enforced upon Aborigines by the culture contact, perhaps none is more disruptive than high density camp life, especially in peoples that normally spent only a small part of the year congregated together. Many of the traits attributed to Aborigines may in fact be artefacts of camp life. Camps erupt in periodic brawls that often become riots ... That these riots are not merely due to drunkenness is obvious because they also occur on 'dry' missions and settlements. There they are put down to disputes over women. Whatever their origins, the riots are disastrous for harmony in the camp as they are for the blackfellow's social image before the whitefellow.

212. Interview with Mr. Pompey Clump Point, originally of Clump Point, at Palm Island on 18 December 1972. Pompey's age from official records was given then as 91 but he looked and may have been ten or more years younger.


Perhaps, the major lesson to be derived from psychologists and psychiatrists is the self-perpetuating factor associated with the deprivation the Aborigines were subjected to after contact. As Moodie noted: 'psychological handicaps are transmissible from one generation to the next'. With relation to the present urban-rural fringe dwellers, Nurcombe looked at the interrelated and overlapping nature of the three sets of man's basic needs: physical, psychosocial and sociocultural. He defined physical needs as those related to food, water, sex and protection from injury and disease; psychosocial needs, 'simply put are to be loved and to love in return'; sociocultural as 'the needs to belong to, to be recognized by and to share the common values of the group-family, friends, work-colleagues, religious group, nation'. Nurcombe then traced the effects of deprivation from malnutrition among infants which may have serious effects on brain developments producing a pool of adults who cannot function effectively and who rear their children in poor conditions thus reproducing the problem. A child who is nutritionally deprived is also likely to live in an overcrowded, insanitary environment exposed to the great variety of pathogenic influences previously described in this chapter. Nurcombe then went on to stress the importance of the mother and the father in satisfying the psychosocial needs and the failure of Aboriginal homes often to satisfy these. With regard to sociocultural needs, Nurcombe asks: 'Is there a cohesive social group to which the child can belong? Does the group possess and transmit skills and values to the child? Are

these skills and values adaptable in terms of the wider society? His conclusions are in terms of 'adaptation to a technological society', the only Australian example, of course, being white Australia. Although Nurcombe acknowledges that 'in their warmth, their sharing and their capacity to regenerate after a century of decimation and segregation, Aborigines may have much to teach Europeans', he refuses to consider whether the Aboriginal or European communities are more 'moral' or 'better' as this is deemed irrelevant compared with the need to adapt to a technological society.

It is not relevant here to discuss the educational soundness of his stress on 'remedial' education for a 'deprived' group rather than building on the positive. However, the three sets of human needs Nurcombe posited to describe socio-cultural deprivation suggest that, in the nineteenth century, an Aboriginal culture, with admittedly great regional and individual variations, was being perpetuated. Aborigines were separated as a caste-class with very limited skills and very different values from those required for success in a capitalist, industrial society. In their social and intellectual isolation from the dominant white culture, they then incidentally transmitted these to succeeding generations.

Thus at the end of the nineteenth century throughout most of North Queensland, there was an Aboriginal people with no unity except a common tradition stemming from the recent history of tribal life, everywhere still to some extent remembered; a tradition of violence, death, and the fear of attack by the colonists; of devastating and inexplicable mortality from diseases; of being defenceless before the whims of the whites; and, for many, of forsaking the old life for the new. As well as suffering, the colonists

217. ibid., p. 88.
218. ibid., p. 90.
brought with them much that the Aborigines found attractive and which made obsolete a great deal of their old life. But they seemed, to the colonists, to be a doomed race destined not to enjoy the usual boon of westernization brought by an imperial power to its subject peoples.