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VOLUME 29 NO. 1

The spirit of Penney, a biographical sketch of
Richard Penney
Robert Foster

‘The Spirit of the Murray’, a poem by Richard Penney
(Introduced by Robert Foster)

Richard Penney as ethnographer
Philip Clarke
Richard Penney’s poem ‘The Spirit of the Murray’, sub-titled ‘Manuscripts recently discovered on the banks of the Murray’, was published by the South Australian Magazine under the pseudonym ‘Cuique’. The first four parts appeared in consecutive editions of the magazine between March and September 1842. The first part of the poem was published not long after Penney had moved to Adelaide and was looking for a new occupation - having finally given up hope of acquiring a government post working with the Aborigines. By the time the fourth part of the poem appeared Penney was the sole editor of a minor Adelaide newspaper called The Examiner. It was more than a year before the last part of the poem appeared, delayed by his responsibilities with the newspaper and increasing ill-health which resulted in his moving to Port Lincoln.

Each part of the poem is accompanied by a covering letter in which Penney makes general comments about the author and content of the poem. In the first letter Penney, as ‘Cuique’, disclaims authorship and establishes the conceit that the poem had been cobbled together from the scribblings of an unknown writer. He claimed that the verses were found among a collection of old papers in an earthen-ware vessel discovered at an old surveyor’s camp at Point Malcolm, near the entrance of Lake Albert.

Knowledge of Penney’s life makes it clear that the poem is largely autobiographical. The first part of the poem is in two sections. The first is a conventional description of his voyage to the colony while the second uses the metaphor of the River Murray as a bridge between the old world and the new. He gives the River voice in the form of the ‘Spirit of the Murray’ which, while portrayed as an omniscient being, is not meant to represent any known Aboriginal mythological figure. Through the ‘Spirit’ he meditates on the past and the changes being wrought in the land by the arrival of the Europeans. It is not until the very end of this part of the poem that he introduces the Aborigines as a subject; the ‘Spirit’ fearing their fate in the face of ‘The white man’s desolating sway’.

In the second part, Penney introduces his alter-ego in the poem, ‘Alcibius’; for whom ‘youth had brought none of the hope and joy that youth should bring’. In a self-pitying manner, he reflects on his life and disappointments in the ‘old world’ before establishing a positive tone and describing his relationship with the Aborigines. He writes of his task tending to the sick and he introduces his Aboriginal companions. He also introduces us to an Aboriginal world-view in what he claims to be a rendering of an Aboriginal song about a feared spirit called ‘Muldaubie’.

The third part of the poem is almost entirely devoted to stories allegedly told in song by his Aboriginal companions, the principal story concerning ‘Coma’ and the origins of their people. Part four of the poem returns to the journey of ‘Alcibius’ and his Aboriginal companions. In an almost ‘pastoral’ style, Penney gives an account of a hunting expedition. After describing the scene as he and his men set sail on the Coorong, he asks his Aboriginal companions to tell him ‘who made the world and all that’s here!’ The remainder of part four and all of part five are devoted to the Aboriginal account of how ‘Ooroondooil’ created the world.

Penney appears to have commenced ‘The Spirit of the Murray’ with a conventional account of colonial experience in mind. This is apparent in the familiar, if poetic, account of his voyage to the colony. Even the early references to the Aborigines being ‘swept away’ by the advance of the Europeans evince a sentiment, and a sentimentality, that would have been familiar to Penney’s readers. However, as the poem progresses the ‘Aboriginal voice’ gradually assumes dominance, and what began as a colonist’s view of the ‘new world’ becomes an Aboriginal view of an old world’ - their world and their origins. It is this aspect that makes the poem so fascinating to those interested in the Aboriginal culture of the Lakes region. Not only does it provide us with an ‘outsiders account of the Aboriginal people in the region, it contains genuine accounts of Aboriginal traditions recorded in the earliest years of settlement.

The poem was originally published in five parts in the South Australian Magazine; Vol. 1, 1-42, pp. 292-298, 389-394, 467-472 & Vol. 2, 1-42, pp. 18-23, 1843, pp. 33 1-336. The poem is transcribed in five sections, each with a covering letter, as it originally appeared in the South Australian Magazine. The footnotes (though numbered here rather than indicated with markers, as in the original) are those of Richard Penney.
MY DEAR SIR - It is by no means an uncommon occurrence in travelling on the banks of the Murray to fall in with the remains of a deserted survey station, the site of which is invariably denoted by the skeletons of former habitations, and fragments of human garments, tools, and utensils of every description scattered about around them, giving to a limited tract of ground in the vicinity all the variety of hues that are to be found in the changes of the kaleidoscope.

Having, on one occasion, pitched my tent close to an old settlement of Poole or Henderson’s party, near Point Malcolm, and at the entrance of Lake Albert, for the convenience of a well of fresh water, that had been dug there, I observed that one of my men, who was engaged in rummaging the heaps of rubbish for pieces of glass with which the natives point their spears, had disturbed a rather bulky substance, the nature of which seemed to puzzle his comprehension. Having, by a sign, made him bring it to me, and shaken off the dust and dirt that covered it, I plainly perceived that it was a species of earthen vessel, which is seldom to be met with in the bush, but of common use in towns, and was rather surprised at finding it in such a situation. My curiosity being stimulated, I examined it more closely, and found that it was cracked nearly in two, which defect had been partly remedied by a ligature of black tape, which also secured round the rim and old Scotch cap, that had been slit for the purpose of allowing it to descend and fasten down the upper shell of one of those tortoises that abound thereabouts, which served as a cover for it. Within which was a mass of dirty papers - enclosed in a wrapper, and labelled “Secret Correspondence” - some of them relating to financial concerns, and others containing much interesting intelligence on family and individual matters. I am taking considerable pains to decipher them, and in making a faithful copy, that so much erudite and pleasing information may not be lost to the public. At the bottom was a quantity of loose paper, on which verses were scribbled in every possible variety of metre; hymns, psalms, wine, love, and war songs, and some, I am sorry to say, of a more exceptionable character. I fancied, however, that a connection existed between many of the verses, and eventually discovered, that the author had been composing a tale of considerable length, although, from the first few verses, you can hardly tell what he is driving at; and that the lighter portions are intended to intersperse the work. Having a great dislike, myself, to rhyming and poetry of all sorts, I threw them aside for a time, but looking them over again, I recollected that, in the infancy of our colonial literature, we must not despise even the contributions of mediocrity, and therefore have determined to arrange them in parts, as far as I am able, and send them, that your more experienced judgment may decide as to their fate. With this you will receive the first part, before the opening of the tale. The author does not seem to have been a man of very good taste, or of more than moderate acquirements; his description of crossing the Line, for instance, is in the commonest jargon, but in the after part, when the tale commences, there are one or two tolerable scenes and descriptions.

Between you and me, sir, considering, as comes out subsequently, that he was the cook of the party, what with grease and dish-cloths, and the distraction of washing pots and providing for the hungry bellies of a number of bushmen, it is rather extraordinary that he should have made so good a fist of it. As for the slight tinge of immorality that I spoke of, it must be suppressed, of course, and although it is to be regretted, as a sign of a loose and unguarded education, yet I believe the young man meant no harm, and becomes, at times, really serious in his outpourings. If you insert this in your Magazine, there is this to be said, that you are not the only editor who has tolerated balderdash and nonsense in these latter times. There is, certainly, some solid comfort in that. Besides sending you a continuation of the enclosed, I shall, from time to time, transmit you my copies of the letters above alluded to, that they may have the advantage of your criticism, and you may judge of the propriety of shewing them to your friends the public.

I am, dear sir,
Yours very truly,

CUIQUE.

The Spirit of the Murray.

A thousand memories crowd upon the mind,
As leaving far astern our father-land,
We cast a long, sad, lingering glance behind,
Or sigh the farewell of an exile band.

It is not that we leave the old renown
Our fathers bought on many a battle field,
The living glories that our annals crown,
The bright escutcheon of Britannia’s shield.

These we may leave and still untouched the chord
That wakes our dearest sympathies may be,
For kings and heroes such can ill afford.
To drop the tear or sink on bonded knee.
A sister’s grief, a mother left to mourn,
Or one whose being on our own depends,
Those who to such endearing ties can turn
The pang of parting feel, they think of absent friends.

The medley scene, the shock that eyes and ears
Must bear, that venture on the mighty deep,
Soon shut us from the past, its hopes and fears,
Which but in visions o’er the soul may creep.
The open eye, the waking ear do find
Enow of present things whereon to dwell,
Where comedies and tragic sights combined
Afford the traveller many a tale to tell,
So like romance, that staid and sober folks,
Who hearken to them by their winter fire,
Kindly give licence to the traveller’s jokes,
Whose truthful stories stamp him for a liar.
Therefore we shall not stop to record here
The over-turnings of all sorts of things,
The fighting, kissing, kicking, but keep clear
Of aught that on our mates reflection flings.

Thus the voyage onward speeds, Madeira high
On the mild seas doth radiant sit and smile,
And loftier Teneriffe doth in the sky
Exalt its peak o’er many a sunny isle.
The Cape de Verdes, which long the rover’s home,
Sent forth the lawless rangers of the wave,
Till now, when ocean’s guardians bravely come
To snatch the negro from a western grave.
Here Andalusia’s treacherous sons contrive
To screen the slaver in his murderous trade,
And at all sorts of villainy connive;
The stranger ‘scapes not from the secret blade.
St. Jago, belched from some volcano’s womb,
A cindery relic of extinguished fire,
The den of Afric’s spoilers and their tomb,
On which offended heaven exhausts its ire.

Here woe and wretchedness in outward shapes,
The lazy strumpet and the convict vile,
The ulcered leper, swine, dogs, pups, and apes
Together live in filth’s most studied style.
Here rags are dear, and oranges are cheap,
And plaintains, yams, limes, and fowls are all
Sold for the cast-off breeches of a sweep,
Or nightman’s tarnished vest at every stall.
We pass from Porto Praya’s leprous air,
And mighty Neptune claims his ancient rites,
Which veteran tars perform with constant care,
As the Line crossing, they behold his lights.
He hails to say, God willing, on the morrow
He’ll pay his best respects to all on board;
The trembling landsmen pass the night in sorrow,
The ladies pray that he may break his word.

The next day comes, with it the old sea-king,
Seated in stale gives forth his mandate dread,
That every tyro they before him bring,
And shave the lower portion of the head.
Who lathers well with tar-brush round the chin,
Cries out to spare the manhood on his jaws,
But as he opes his lips, the brush pops in,
Mouthful revolting unto gentle maws.
The tonsor with rude hand doth scrape his cheek
With iron hoop, rough edge, midst grins and groans,
For vain he intercedes by gesture meek,
The hearts of Neptune’s sons are hard as stones.
Then douse him in the scupper or a tub,
Adding a soaking to his woeful plight,
He may be spared perhaps, if he stand bub,
And know the approved way to make all right.

From equatorial calms and tempests free,
That lengthen out the weary voyager’s way,
The keel doth plough new furrows in the sea,
And round her bows the nimble porpoise play,
Swift in the wake the bright beneta glance,
And on her quarter spouts the ponderous whale,
Or Nautilus his fragile bark doth launch,
And to the zephyr trusts his flimsy sail.
A line of shore doth on the horizon loom,
Where Table Mountain marks the Afric coast,
The lion’s back emerging from the gloom,
De Gama’s glory and the Dutchman’s toast.
The temple of the winds doth here contrast
The grace and beauty of its Grecian mould,
With Dutch conception solid, clumsy, vast,
The work of science, with the works of gold.

The Southern Ocean round us rolls afar,
The air grows more ethereal and light,
The golden heavens are decked with many a star,
That shines not in our darker, northern night.
We feel a new creation, sea and sky
Seem of a purer element - we breathe
More freely - the quick pupil of the eye
With a more strengthened vision doth perceive.
Each sense is keener, every passion glows
With more intensity, - the hearts warm flood
More quickly through its thousand channels flows,
And life renewed teems in each drop of blood.
These happy omens from the promised land,
Kind nature sends to cheer us on our way,
And raise fresh hopes as we approach the strand,
Where she resigns to man her ancient sway.

In dreams no longer view Australia’s shore,
The topman hails it in the evening light,
And expectation’s hollow reign is o’er.
Haste to the shrouds and strain your eager sight!
The ship runs gently on till mid of night,
Then the old navigator tacks or stays,
To wait the breaking of the morning light,
When the near coast rewards our anxious gaze.
There kang’roo Island guards St. Vincent’s Straits,
That bear the Investigator’s deathless name,
And Althorpe Island at the entrance waits
Each shore is one long catalogue of fame.
Great men and things have been recorded here;
And heroes’ battles have been localised,
Jarvis, Lannes, Jaffa, Rivoli appear,
As French or English voyagers have baptised.

We tread the earth again, that noted ground
Teeming with curious forms of bird and beast;
Where those who study nature’s face have found
More strange things than the fancy of the east
Did conjure in its chimeras, that held
Nature in fable for a thousand years.
Here the geologist has first beheld
A pillar for the fabric that he rears,
Types of that primeval being, that had lost
A place in the creation, but whose bones
A world of doubt to learned heads had cost,
To read their mystery locked up in stones.
Links in the chain of creatures here supplied,
And a vast unknown field to wander o’er,
With many a Gordian knot to be untied,
What can the adventurer’s spirit wish for more?

Germs of a future empire strewed around
New Holland’s coast, like to the osseous joints,
Components of the cranial arch, are found,
Whose embryo parts converge from separate points,
Each table from a single nucleus fed,
Then as they grow the divers radii meet
And by their union form a perfect head.
The centre of each portion is the seat
Of separate strength, so that on all sides,
Early matured, a point defensive lies
To guard against whatever ill betides,
Or fend the blows that early days surprise.
Colonial legs do march with rapid stride,
Port Phillip trips upon old Sydney’s heels,
And South Australia presses side by side,
For now the advantage of her youth she feels.

To other lands she is the beating heart
And her artery, the Murray’s stream,
When commerce on her mighty breast doth start,
With men and cities, numberless, shall teem,
Our tongue may deal improperly, nor dread
That the event will falsify our word,
When prejudice, with later seers is dead,
Though, as we speak, the laugh and sneer is heard.
Man builds his cities and time pulls them down;
Nature erects her capitals and they,
When nations change and e’en their name is flown,
Live, flourish on amidst a realm’s decay.
From Murrumbidgee plains unto the sea,
There is a spirit o’er the river broods,
That soon shall burst its bonds by heaven’s decree,
And pour fame’s trumpet blast adown its floods.

Wrapped in our ‘possum rugs, yet half awake,
We gazed around upon the glorious scene
Where Taipang looks on Alexandria’s Lake,
And on the distant sea the eye of e’en
Descends. On either hand the watery brink
Gives the day birth or draws the veil of night,
From the lake’s edge the morning shadows shrink,
And on the ocean fades the evening light.
On Taipang’s crag, overhangs the stream,
Our forest fire did cast a cheerful blaze,
Above our heads the passing swans did scream,
Whose warning note the stranger’s path betrays.
Our ancient pipe, the solace of the bush,
Had Phoenix-like expired to burn again,  
And we had sunk to sleep in midnight’s hush,  
When broke upon our ears this minstrel strain -

‘Am I not heavenly born? oh speak,  
If yet our lyric voice be weak,  
Ye muses of another sphere,  
And fan the spark that kindles here.  
Am I not Heavenly born? My breast -  
On which the placid moonbeams rest -  
The wandering planets, as they pass,  
Reflects as in a mirror glass,  
And every star that gleams on high,  
As softly gleaming, there doth lie.

‘Look on my banks with woodland crowned!  
Hark to my ripples fairy sound!  
And say it is the garb of heaven  
Unto her lovely Murray given.  
These are not speechless, every tree  
Pours on the morn its minstrelsy,  
And forth from every bough doth spring,  
A golden crest or ruby wing,  
And brighter than the sky’s own blue  
Is that on which yon fen duck flew.

‘Each tributary stream, that yields  
Its waters from a hundred fields,  
Each mountain flood, the vernal shower,  
The drops of dew from every flower,  
The springs that midst my torrent rise,  
Are all the produce of the skies.  
Am I not heavenly born? My land  
Owns yet but its creator’s hand,  
Nature its uncontested  
Enclasps in her voluptuous arms,  
And far and wide their offspring roam,  
Amidst a wild and flowery home.

‘They tell me of the beauteous Rhine,  
Rich in the clusters of the vine,  
Where the ripe corn with heavy ear  
Bows to the sickle every year;  
And bright eyed girls and stalwart youth,  
Guided by industry and truth,  
Daily collect, with easy toil,  
The ample treasures of the soil;  
Of father Thames, upon whose bank  
The haunts of men grow high and rank,  
Whither a thousand sails unfurled  
Convey the produce of the world;  
And midst the plenty of the earth  
Reigns direst woe and greatest dearth.

‘That Caesar found these realms as bare,  
and ruder than the Murray’s are;  
But countries long since passed away,  
Have formed their gardens of to-day,  
And labour smoothed the rugged road  
For art to toil on, till it strode  
On manhood’s legs, which now in prime  
Changes the lace of every clime.
‘So o’er the Murray’s vales and plains,  
Through which a silent wildness reigns,  
Soon bleating flocks shall feed their way,  
The cock proclaim the break of day,  
And lowing herds, at eventide,  
Shall bed the meadow pools beside,  
Or when oppressed by noontide beam  
Shall seek the Murray’s cooler stream,  
And the white from far shall roam  
To pride him on his Murray home.

The banks of Thames, and Clyde, and Tyne,  
of Liffey, and the Elbe, and Rhine,  
Shall send their sons from every rank,  
To mingle on my fertile bank,  
And wrangling races here shall blend  
Their names, in husband, brother, friend.

‘Changes have come, fair lake, since thou  
Didst feel the first adventurous prow  
Bearing a gallant band, divide  
The waters of they peaceful tide,  
And Sturt beheld, with transport rife,  
The region he had called to life.  
With wonder do my children see  
The white man range from sea to sea,  
For on their smooth and beaten ways,  
Untrodden from the ancient days,  
Save by their simple father’s tread,  
Or by the feet those steps have led,  
Now rough and jumbled tracks reveal  
The frequent print of hoof and heel.

‘Reports that ring on every hand,  
Tell of the stranger in the land,  
And every sort of fowl and game,  
Erst in their native wilds so tame,  
Now scent destruction in the air  
And watch around with ceaseless care.  
Alas! those harbingers of woe,  
That come, the not less sure, though slow.  
Not only must the swan forsake  
The bosom of my lovely lake,  
And not alone the kangaroo  
Be banished from my values too,  
But my unlettered child must be  
The victim of that harsh decree,  
Which writ in blood and penned by man,  
To violate his maker’s plan,  
Acts first transgression o’er again,  
And ratifies the deed of Cain.

‘Restless, his children roam in vain,  
Where peace or happiness do reign;  
For peace and joy before them fly,  
Whose lust no climes can satisfy.  
The white man’s desolating sway  
Will sweep my native race away,  
That simple race, as free as air,  
Their iron yoke could never bear;  
Where freedom reigns, the tyrants breath  
\lust ever be a blast of death.  
Better their name for ever die  
Than lose their native liberty.
DEAR SIR - I promised to send you, from time to time, and in parts, a continuation of “the Spirit of the Murray,” as I could compile them from the almost illegible manuscripts that came into my possession in so singular a manner as I related to you once before. Perhaps I may as well inform you, what the idea of the author, in writing the lucubrations in question appears to me to have been, as I am, probably, the only person, besides himself, whose eye has perused them, it may be interesting to your readers, as well as satisfactory to yourself, to anticipate, in some measure, the nature of the work. The author evidently intends to give a description of that desultory sort of life, which has been the chosen path of a few singular persons, who either are, or imagine themselves to be, intellectually, out of the line of ordinary mortals, and, in their estimation of things, take a different standard from that which is orthodox. These are not exactly madmen, they ought rather to be called miserable men, to whom philosophy brings no delight, religion no comfort, and in the end they too frequently become the victims of misanthropy, or the inmates of bedlam. In youth, the elasticity and enthusiasm of the mind supports it under repeated disappointments, there is no such thing as continued dejection, and hope - shipwrecked - soon finds another bottom and other spars whereon to spread her canvass to the gale, and it is not, until she has grounded her bark on every shoal and split upon every rock - finding herself, at length, bankrupt and growing old - that she yields to the all conquering hand of time. Then the critical time arrives for minds so constituted; they have but two courses before them, either to take hold of the friendly hand of experience, who will lead them to the hallowed halls of virtue and prosperity, or throw themselves into the arms of despair, where grief and discontent will devour them. The poem of “the Spirit of the Murray” in some degree unfolds the train of thought and action of such a being, who seems also somewhat tinctured with benevolence towards his fellow creatures, and indulges in admiration of the naked beauties of nature. I fancy that this second part, which I now send you, must have been written during one of the visits of the author to town - probably to receive his pay - when young men are too apt, especially after a long “banyan day” in the bush, to indulge in excesses of which they have, afterwards, full time to repent. Besides the incoherence and slight want of perspicuity in the style, which has led me to form this opinion, the manuscript is of such a variety of colours, that it puts me in mind of a rag of the famous “coat of Joseph,” than of anything else. The successive dyes, stains, and tints of porter, port wine, lamp oil and candle grease, has rendered it extremely difficult for me to decipher some part of the lines I now send you, and, in other parts, it being impossible, I have taxed my own ingenuity for appropriate interpolations, which, if they are not improvements, do not constitute a very apparent incongruity. The author is passionately attached to the district of the Murray and the lakes, and indulges in enthusiastic expectations of the future destinies of that noble river, which I am inclined to think, also, some of us will live to see realised. He wishes to create by his effusions a local poetry, which may hereafter interest the traveller, if it does not attract him to the spot, and moreover to develop to his countrymen the character of the native, of his mythological notions, his habits of thought and life, for which as they live, in a sphere of action remote and entirely different from that of civilization, poetry may, possibly, be more adapted than prose; the latter, to be felt, must be expressed in language, but the former possesses the property of expressing by implication, what we could not easily render intelligible by the ordinary forms of language. As I shall continue to send you fresh supplies as often as I can.

I remain, dear sir,
Yours truly,

Adelaide, June, 1842
CUIQUE

THE SPIRIT OF THE MURRAY.
PART II.

The slumberer roused him, as the moon’s pale light
Dissolved the drowsy shadows of the trance,
And, with the constellations of the night,
Shone brightly on the earth’s fair countenance;
Beauty, in gorgeous robes, had wandered forth
From her melodious home amidst the stars;
The south illumined and lit up the north
With her delightful presence, the light cars
Of fairy satellites, that hold her train,
By magic driven, struck forth a thousand hues,
And shot a thousand sparks on earth and main;
Light is her golden crown, and music dwells
Upon her many-toned-tongue, until
Her glowing lips unloose its wondrous spells,
The tumults of the troubled world to still.

The voice of song had ceased, but a low sound
Still lingered on the ear. The cold night air
That blew upon his face, the chilly ground
Exhaling damps, the fire’s inconstant glare
From the burnt embers, made our hero shiver,
Wrap the rug closer round him, but no sleep
Fell on his e’en, some devil in the liver,
One of those mischievous blue elfs, who keep
Watch for their father Satan, and dispose
Man for acts desperate and hatch a store
Of wicked oaths for use, when choler flows,
Sad fellows all, who make good men deplore,
One of these turned the channel of the bile
And send it thumping tingling through the frame,
Throbbed in the temples, cramped the legs and while
He tried to sleep, played night mare’s tragic game.

This would not do and he got up to see
For some dry sticks wherewith to make a blaze
And lighted on the branches of a tree
That had grown on the spot in ancient days,
But now its arms lay blasted, strewn around,
The trunk, riven by lightning and black,
Rose like an antique pillar from the ground
Above the other trees. There was no lack
Of wood at Taipang, so he soon got warm,
Rubbing his hands before the cheerful log,
Then turned him round to heat both sides and form
A circle of exclusion to the fog.
He lit his pipe and o’er his shoulders threw
A rug, and mused upon many things,
The shadows and the trees by moonlight drew
Him into thought and lent to fancy wings.

Wood fires, at night, assume a hundred shapes
And likenesses; sometimes the flame shoots high
And writhes like a tortured snake, that gapes
Showering its fiery entrails to the sky;
Or, in the very middle, one may trace,
Between the varied heats and charred ends,
In profile, many a grave and comic face
Of Jews, or doctors, fools, or Turks or friends
Within the logs, the crevices and bark,
A host of tiny insects find a home,
Who soon the heat encreasing round them mark,
And hurry forth, unconscious where they roam;
Backwards and forwards, still the foe is there,
Around, beneath, about on every side,
Till, urged by madness or vain hopes, they dare
Too near the danger and are quickly fried.

The wild dogs’ gathering cry, the savage howl,
Mournful and hungry, on the silence comes,
Startling the solitude through which they prowl,
Like the alarum notes of midnight drums
To peaceful villages; the answering cry,
From distant packs, floats slowly on the wind,
And then the sounds for a few moments die.
Loud and shrill the yelp comes as they find
And open on the traces of their prey,
Waking the forest echoes in the chase,
Till, to the upper hills, they start away,
Following the scent with quick and constant pace.
Nature is sleepless, in her tranquil hour
She still pursues with time, an equal race,
Who can but change her visage, all his power
Cannot impose one wrinkle on her face.

These, as he mused, did furnish food for thought,
Comparisons of smaller things with great;
Material trifles, through all time, have taught
Philosophy to scorn the whims of fate.
Nature is but the mortal type and form
Of the Creator’s attributes, and man
Therein may study Him. Earth’s meanest worm
May surely gather to itself and span
A portion in that high similitude,
By increments, just as a little bird
Chipped helpless in the far off solitude,
Unfledged and weak, whose curious nest doth gird
Its infant world. Slowly the feathers show,
And last, the suffer pinions see the light,
Till, gaining strength and courage as they grow,
O’er highest tops it soon essays its flight.

So man, attentive to her teaching, learns
And the mind’s pinions shoot to ample wings;
To knowledge’ sun his wistful face he turns.
And finds his lesson printed on all things.
Some like the noisy city, some to dwell
Where love doth smile, ensconced in rosy bowers.
And art doth gild the sweet suburbs of hell,
And plants their garden walks with choicest (lowers;
Some dream that they could love the distant wild,
Where nature’s face, unveiled, doth beam with joy
And freshness, like the visage of a child
Just washed, and hasting for its Christmas toy;
For some, the rugged wilderness contains
A home to which the sated heart can cling,
And e’en, amidst the hurried world, retains
Reflections such as these, that memories bring.

Alcibius was young, but youth had brought
None. of the hope and joy that youth should bring,
He’d knelt in science’ temple and had sought
Joy from a brighter and purer spring,
Than that, which, midst the pageants of the world
Rises, a muddy and a brackish fountain,
In eddies, jets, and waves, as rivers hurled
From the vast abyss of the Gyser’s mountain.
He had drank of Marah’s bitter waters,
And rue had made him wan, wormwood had dyed
His soul in bitterness, so that, of earth’s daughter’s,
Misfortune was his loved and chosen bride,
He’d climbed the hill of science, but the top
Was far above him. Even as he strove
The bitterness diminished, drop by drop,
And his mind teemed with charity and love.

The gall was mixed with honey, love with hate,
Each in its several portions, not combined,
The dove with fiercer vulture cannot mate,
Yet they may live both reconciled and kind.
Alcibius was not tied to climes or land,
He saw his brethren scattered o’er the earth
That was his country, on whatever strand
He found the truest and the humblest hearth,
He’d roamed the busy field of Europe o’er,
The Elbe, where commerce long hath built a home,
The Seine, that hath beheld her eagles soar
To vex the eyrie of imperial Rome.
Florence the cradle and the nurse of art,
And Tiber’s capitol of ancient fame,
Who, now, must see her old renown depart
To consecrate the young Rienzi’s name.

Who, that hath breathed the southern air, can live
In the damp fog that clouds the northern zone?
Italia’s breath, whose inspirations give
Passion a voice, and to that voice a tone
Is not so fresh, so soft, as that which plays
When heat exhausts, in evening’s transient light,
Relieves the oppression of Australian’ days,
And fills the summer evening with delight.
Along Australia’s coasts and streams are found
A race of man, despised, oppressed by all
Who claim the name of man; the lordly sound
Of human speech is in them, and they fall
Like leaves in autumn, as all others do,
And, like the grass, death’s scythe doth mow them down,
The old blades with some hundreds of the new,
When o’er them Azrael’s fatal wing hath flown.

They laugh, and weep, and frantic grow with rage,
And kindness melts the hardness of the heart:
The infant squeals, the hair gets white with age,
And frowns of manhood from the brows depart.
All these are human symptoms, though the skin
Be darker, than of Europe’s fairer child,
Nathless it hides the self-same soul within,
Rude and encumbered as their native wild.
So thought Alcibius, and his mind, intent
To study nature, drew his footsteps here,
Rambling from tribe to tribe, to pitch his tent
Where’er the signs of savage life appear.
Oft o’er Lake Albert’s waters plied his bark,
And oft o’er Alexandria’s waves it flew,
Pressed onward by the gale, by light and dark,
Scorched by the summer sun or wet with dew.
He learned the language of the wild, could tell
The story of the stars - the limes when fish
Would to the shoals repair - the proper spell
To charm away the wild-men. Did he wish
To conjure up the foul fiend, he could call
Muldaubie’s night-cry through the silent trees,
And rustle in their branches, and appal
And make the savage tremble in his knees.
They loved him as their father, for they saw
One who could right their petty wrongs, and give
Protection to the weak, here, where no law
But that of might prevailed - where people live
In constant terror of some lurking foe
A thirst for his revenge. He frequent came
Where victims of disease were pining slow,
And sickness wore away a giant’s frame.
Alcibius knew the virtues of each herb,
In med’cine not unskill’d, he gave them health,
And he, who, demons of the air could curb,
Became the monarch of their commonwealth;
His mariners were all of native mould,
Armed with the modern requisites of war,
As many an echo of the Murray told,
And may be seen in many a traitor’s scar.
To hesitate were death, with savage men,
And when the fray is over, hearty blows
Are not misunderstood - so it was then.
His dark and naked crew around him sleep,
Stretched by the fire in rude and sound repose,
Unbroken except when the flames may creep
Along the log, too near unto their toes.
Or if the screech-owl shrieks, flitting about
In the dim light of even, and when morn
From the eye-fringes of the heaven peeps out,
Screaming amongst the woods like one forlorn.
That note of fear doth start them from their bed,
Wildly they stare and roll their glistening eyes,
As if, at once, both sense and sight had fled,
Or that they saw some demon in the skies.

Children of superstition, they have learned
To warp creation from its easy course,
To knot it up in mysteries and turned
Good into signs of evil, and they curse
A simple creature for its harmless ways,
Which signifying nothing, they conceive
Pregnant with import! As their fancy strays,
And whatsoever it conjures, they believe.

Truth is obscure within them, reason too
That is her pedestal, remains entombed
Beneath their ancient ignorance, nought new
For ages hath their intellect illumined,
Thus, now, they tremble at a bird and see
Death sitting on its wing, nor deem it vain
To exorcise it with corroboree,
So by our holy priests are devils slain!
The friars assail the fiends with ayes and paters
And drive them off with Latin and with Greek,
The natives borrow their text book from nature’s,
And thus their simple exorcisms speak.

Muldaubie¹, thy ill-omened cry
Troubles the sleeper’s ear,
But if thy shadow meet his eye
He knows that death is near.

By rivers dark and deep,
That sink beneath the earth
And through wild caverns creep,
Thy wretched dam gave birth.

And groaned into the world with thee,
A flood of wail and woe;
No wamra in the land can be
Secure against its foe.

¹ Muldaubie: A term used in the text without a clear definition, possibly a name or reference.
The mighty arm grows weak, the glance
Is dim, that saw afar,

1. Muldaubie the name of an evil spirit corresponding in some degree to our Satan - the description the natives give of his personal appearance, is very much like that of the old popish descriptions of the devil. They believe that he appears at night when the moon is up, in the evening or just before the dawn of day, in the form of the screech-owl, although he assumes occasionally other appearances. Those to whom he appears in dreams or who see his form almost infallibly die. I have myself been a witness to the effect of this singular delusion and the strength of the imagination, uncontrolled by reason, has been, in these instances, singularly exemplified. I have tried every means of persuasion to counteract its influence on those who have become its victims, but they have always died. The above is nearly a correct rendering of a native song.

No more our youth can poise the lance,
Or raise the shout of war.

But in the gloomy tree they lie,
   Wrapt in the robes of death,
And mothers hold their vigils by
   And murmur forth their breath.

Begone, our boys we need
   To throw the quivering spear,
And let their young limbs bleed,
   For all they hold most dear!

Then turn thy evil form away
   From where the black man roams,
Nor come at eve, or dawn of day
   To desolate their homes.
THE SPIRIT OF THE MURRAY.
MANUSCRIPTS RECENTLY DISCOVERED ON
THE BANKS OF THE MURRAY.
TO THE EDITOR OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MAGAZINE.

MY DEAR SIR - You have been so kind as to express your approbation of the contents of the manuscripts containing the “Spirit of the Murray,” and, therefore, the author having provided an ample store of materials, I hope to get ready for your monthly numbers more regularly. The attempt, that he has made, to give a correct idea of the native superstitions, and to translate the poetry, in which their traditions are clothed, into a metre, as nearly as possible, resembling that of the original language, may, perhaps, induce some persons to believe the native songs embodied in the work, to be the creations of his own fancy, rather than the result of his researches. Many people, more especially in the Australian colonies, have allowed their minds to be prejudiced to a ridiculous extent against the aboriginal race; and, in the face of the most convincing examples and circumstances to the contrary, still maintain the interiority of their mental capacities; and they cannot imagine that the intellect of the Australia native is of sufficient calibre to construct sentences of poetry, or even to originate poetical ideas. On this subject, Major Mitchell, in the account of his expedition, observes - “There can be little doubt that the corrobory is the medium through which the delights of poetry are enjoyed, in a limited degree, even by these primitive savages of New Holland” (p. 6). And, speaking of them generally, he says - My experience enables me to speak in the most favourable terms of the aborigines, whose degraded position in the midst of the white population, affords no just criterion of their merits. The quickness of apprehension of those in the interior was very remarkable; for nothing in all the complicated adaptations we carried with us, either surprised or puzzled them. They are never awkward; on the contrary, in manners and general intelligence they appear superior to any class of white rustics I have seen. Their power of mimicry seems extraordinary, and their shrewdness shines even through the medium of imperfect language, and renders them, in general, very agreeable companions” (p. 340). Little, in his “History of New South Wales,” alluding to the aborigines, makes the following remarks - “They are not indifferent to the charms of song, having certain poetical sentences which they make use of, with some attention to time and cadence, when sitting in their canoes a-fishing, when engaged in the chase, and also such as are suitable to express contempt and defiance.” We find the aborigines, throughout Australasia, identified as one race, and connected by the general analogy of their language and habits of life. The natives of the banks of the Murray hold a high rank in this lam 11 for intelligence, courage, and ingenuity; and their poetry evinces a greater amount of original and imaginative genius than our imperfect knowledge of their tongue will allow us to demonstrate by a translation. Little has anticipated our author in the idea of collecting and giving the poetry of these simple people a place amongst the literature of nations; but we believe no one has gone before him in carrying it into execution. He continues - “Such being the state of their poetry, which certainly is connected with song, the world may look forward to the time when some individual shall arise to collect and arrange the scattered fragments of the poems, and give us a supplement to Ossian, a translation of the poems composed, shall I say, by the great Carrahdy, five or six hundred years before the British set a foot on the shores of Australasia.” The Romans, when they took possession of, and colonised Britain, felt quite as little reverence and admiration for our aboriginal forefathers, or for their legends, as Europeans now entertain for the nativ...
And his unconscious head to earth declined,
Scarcely before the star of morning rose,
Following the midnight splendour close behind;
As maids, in the suite of earthly queen,
When all the gaudy, spangled court hath passed,
Support the train of majesty, and sheen
More purely, from the rich and gay contrast.
So taketh up the brilliant train of night,
The morning star, and melloweth every ray
In its mild gloamin’ beams of virgin light,
Before the first lines of the breaking day.
Then the dawn upwards sends its faintest shade;
The beacon gently kindles in the east,
And nature, in night’s fading hues arrayed,
Owes slowly, that the chilly reign hath ceased.

That early beam of day did soon awake
The natives, sleeping round the mould’ring fire,
And rising with the morn, they quickly shake
The dew-drops from their rude and scant attire.
A hide of kangaroo, or blanket hitched
With thongs across the shoulder, or a rug
Of soft opossum skins, with sinews stitched,
That keep their naked bodies warm and snug.
They rise, and yawn, and nerveless limbs they stretch,
Till starts the numbness from each cord and vein;
Then boughs of quick wood from the scrub they fetch,
And heat themselves before the flames again.
But black men, ever on the air do send,
When the first daylight streaks the east with grey,
A song, that with the varied scene may blend,
And thus, this morn, in concert, chanted they.

TARRUNKIE.
Where is the light and the father of days,
Wither has black night, his burning face, driven;
Was it quenched in the ocean, that drank up his rays,
Or, again will he glide through the regions of heaven?

CHERABOC.
Far off, on Parnka’s distant side,
Where the lake mingles with the sky.
And farthest hills the banks divide,
Where Murray flows majestic’ly,
Mark thou, the brighter shades that spread,
And break the blending mists in twain;
Chase the dull clouds from Parnka’s bed,
And lift morn’s eyelid up again!
’Tis the sunshine,
His gleam is there,
Night doth resign
The realms of air!

POMEBIE.
The swan doth rise on heavy wing,
And shrilly pipes his morning note,
The meroles from the she-oak sing.
The ducks, from lake side, slowly, float;
The weary cranes of snowy white,
Do look around with care,
And pelicans, at every height
Wing circles in the air;
The bittern booms, the blue-bird calls
His mate, with flaming crest;
The dew from every leaflet falls,
Whereon a bird did rest.

ALL.
Then let us join the happy throng:
Come, rise up black men all,
And, with the merry birds of song,
Respond to nature’s call!

TARRUNKIE.
Long did our fathers wander through
The lofty gum trees’ shade,
And marked the yearly falling strew
The soil, where it had stayed
Unmoved, for long, long years,
Weeping its blood-red tears.
An old wife, breathless, fled and came
Upon their paths, pressed by the flame
Of the bush fire, which ran
And the hot winds did fan
Close after her, and crackled round,
Sweeping the forest to the ground,
With crash on crash, and fire and smoke
Followed her steps and thus she spoke -

Up, Coma, up, and fly with me,
Thy children and thy wife,
If, haply, we may reach the sea,
And save our perilled life.

From Toolcoon’s distant land I come,
Where fiery spirits dwell,
Who have destroyed my tribe and home,
And seek our race to quell.

Through many tribes of men I’ve passed,
That scorned my hurried word,
Yet, as the flames did follow fast,
Their dying shrieks I heard.

Thine, Coma, is the only race
The angry fiends can spare,
Then, up, and, with thy quickest pace,
By flight, my safety share.

Coma left spear, and shield, and fled;
Each lubra seized a son,
The father took two girls and sped,
Whither their guide did run.

The sea was very far away;
Although they quickly fly,
Faster the flames pursued, and they
Thought only but to die.

The old wife, faint and weary grown,
Fell down, a tree beneath,
And yielding up a heavy groan,
She ceased, thenceforth, to breathe.

Whither shall Coma fly - for weak,
His lubras slowly crawl,
What place of refuge shall he seek
Against that fiery wall?

The smoke, the old wife’s form concealed,
The fire came swiftly on.
The fumes did reach the brain, he reeled,
And Coma’s sense was gone.

A form rose from the kindled grass,
   Where the old wife had died,
And, through the burning woods, did pass,
    Till Coma she espied.

She stamped upon the ground, a flood
   Burst from the heated soil,
Which, round about the blazing wood,
   Began to hiss and boil.

The water rose, the earth did cool,
The old wife, in her hand,
Took up a little from the pool,
   And sprinkled on the band.

Coma, my son! arise, and live,
   These waters, far and wide,
To thee, and to thy sons I give,
   To dwell, their banks beside.

Toolcoon shall ne’er pursue, or burn
   Thee, or thy children more,
This river, back, its flames, shall turn,
   E’er they approach thy shore.

Here is a tiny, baken, boat,
   Thou, with a spear, may’es guide;
Fear not, but it will safely float,
   And launch it on the tide.

Do thou, the downward stream pursue,
   Until thou well canst hear
The roar of ocean, or thy view
   Of its blue waves be clear.

That is thy land, this river there,
   Will spread abroad its waves;
Thine and thy children’s home, where’er
   Its seaward current laves.

There make thy paths, and every child
   Will follow in thy track,
But shun the inland scrubby wild,
   That teems with shadows black.

The fish, that sports with shining scale,
   And all the beasts that drink,
And birds, that gaily fly and sail
   About the reedy brink.

These are enough for thee to eat,
   So climb not in the tree, 9
Thai may deceive thy careful feet,
   Or bruise thy active knee.
Give thou unto this stream my name  
Parnka, Ooroondooil’s own,  
And, when a man disputes thy claim,  
Shew him this charmed stone.

His sight will fail, and dark as night,  
His blighted orbs will roll,  
Until he owns my Coma’s right,  
And Parnka’s high control.

Coma sailed down the rapid stream,  
For many, many miles,  
At length he saw wide waters gleam,  
And cliffs that looked like isles.

The current swiftly swept across;  
His bark upon the lake,  
Did roughly on the billows toss,  
And every fibre shake.

Till, as he drew the heights between,  
That form the western head,  
From whence the sandy hills are seen,  
That rise from ocean’s bed.

He heard the roar upon the beach,  
He saw the breakers’ haze,  
He turned his bark, in haste, to reach  
A hill, to mount and gaze.

‘Neath Taipang’s crag, the weary man  
Brought in his light canoe,  
Himself and lubras camped and wan,  
Their legs they hardly knew.

Coma sat down beside his fire,  
And here, upon this rock,  
Was the first wurly of our sire,  
The cradle of our stock!
DEAR SIR - I send you another portion of the “Spirit of the Murray,” as I am anxious to bring the work to a conclusion, to publish it in a separate form; and I fear that it will run through many more numbers yet. The occupations that the natives are here made to take up so naturally, and the familiarity with which they are represented to handle fire-arms, may appear rather extraordinary to some of your readers; but I have found that they are very little behind Europeans in the use of weapons and, in general fidelity, when properly instructed and treated. The version of the Legend of Ooroondooil and the Creation, given in this number, is strictly in accordance with the native traditions; although, in this instance, the author has embodied several scraps of mythology into one story, so as to give a connected view of the whole of this simple fable.

Captain Grey has given a version of one of the incantations of the aboriginal tribes of Western Australia, in which we may notice a very great resemblance to one of the songs of our own tribes; and, indeed, we can almost recognise an identity between the habits and modes of thought and action of these distant branches of the same family. Captain Grey must have been a very close observer, and have studied the character of the aborigines pretty thoroughly, to have gleaned so copious and correct an insight into the character of the natives and of their peculiar ideas. It is rather remarkable, that all these tribes refer to the north as the land of sorcerers - a fact which I recollect observing and mentioning in a report to Governor Gawler on the habits of the natives, which was Laid before the Legislative Council, in April, 1841.

One thing connected with the native races of Australia has long puzzled me, and that is, the existence of a distinct race of people in that isolated portion of the continent separated from it by Bass’s Straits. I have seen several of the Van Dieman’s Land aborigines, and there are two or three now living amongst the settlers at Encounter Bay. They have every appearance of being a distinct race, having all the prominent features of the African Hottentots - the woolly hair, and all the other characteristics, as distinctly marked as in the Cape of Good Hope. The geographical position of these people is also similar, at the very extremity of the continent, as if they were the remains of the most ancient of mankind, who had gradually made way and been driven before other races, till they could go no farther, and that then they had been allowed to make their homes in the ends of the earth. It remained for the desolating sway of the European to finish the work of nature.

Tribes of animals have become extinct - and why not, therefore, races of men? Nothing but the interposition of Christianity can save the wreck of the aboriginal races before the immense array that civilization is marshalling against them.

I am, Dear Sir,
Yours very truly,
CUIQUE.

Adelaide, September 26th, 1842.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MURRAY.
PART IV.

The morning incense o’er, Tarrunkie took
His carabine from out a hollow trunk,
A drier prime into the pan he shook,
And Pomebie filled his pipe and lit his punk;
Cheraboc whistled, and the drowsy hounds,
That growled all night, ran quickly at his call,
And stood before him in a few short bounds,
Then jumped and barked, and watched his movements all.
Tarrunkie went to the Lake’s reedy brim,
Concealing many a swamp and miry pond,
While Cheraboc and Pomebie did abscond
With eager dogs, to scout round every hill,
Through every scrub, the leaping kangaroo;
And when as much as they could lift did kill,
Returned with bended backs and loud halloo.

The lofty ranges. almost bare of trees,
The rocky gully, where the she-oak grows,
And grass, that waves like corn before the breeze -
The flying doe sits here, secure from foes,
Looking around, or at full length reclined.
Beneath the shade, nipping the herbs in play;  
Or, when unwonted sounds stray on the wind,  
To the declining range, leaping away.  
One and one bound she takes, till, gathering speed,  
She seems a creature less of earth, than air,  
The fleetest hound of every nerve hath need,  
To follow on, in chase, her wild career.  
Rather on wing, than foot, she makes the plain,  
And, like a ploughshare, furrows up her track,  
Like arrow, cleaves the leafy bush in twain,  
And might boughs, before her course, bend back.

Such hounds Alcibius had, Van Dieman’s breed,  
The cross (no mongrel form) the mastiff gives  
To the sleek greyhound’s pup, his strength, her speed  
A rare colonial sort, the best that lives.  
‘us a fine sport, where Murray’s water run,  
To scare the blind bird from the dark oak tree,  
And mark her fly at random in the sun,  
Whilst loud loo-los the huntsman on the lea  
Just as he spies a herd of does sneak through  
The skirting brushwood to the nearest brake -  
And joey, with smooth coat of lighter hue,  
That soon to some snug bush doth him betake.  
The does do start upon the first alarm,  
The eager hounds to highest prey incline.  
Unseen, unchased, and far from present harm,  
The wary boomer tracks the tangled vine.

But one old hound, scored in a hundred fights  
Like an old soldier, full of craft and years,  
That hath hung back, the well-known boomer sights,  
And dashes off, like lightning, through the tiers;  
He followeth not the track, but edgeth round  
The nearest opening of the woods to gain,  
And runneth to and fro to catch the sound  
And find which way the unconscious buck hath ta’en.  
The buck comes slowly on, and stops awhile  
To gaze, to graze, or to list on the wind,  
Scenting the air, like any spicy isle,  
With the peculiar odour of his kind,  
Then, as he clears the thicket, he is caught  
And down before his first surprise is o’er -  
The veteran hound doth grip his neck full taught,  
And doth not quit until his fights no more.

These are the manly sports on Murray’s side,  
To follow on the wandering emu’s trail,  
Or chase the black swan o’er the rippled tide  
In moulding season, when their pinions fail;  
Or watch by moonlight at the wombat’s hole  
Upon the bank above with rifle ready -  
And when he stirs to take his evening stroll,  
Just it lift up, and let your aim be steady.  
For those who may prefer their dog and gun,  
Murray can match old England’s choicest covers;  
The field sports of the South will yield to none  
In game of all sorts, or wild ducks and plovers.  
Such sport as that, which England’s nobles loved,  
Ere yeoman’s hand had dropped the yew-tree bow,  
When the stout forester through greenwood roved,  
The regions of the Murray can bestow.
Upon thy banks, where coolest zephyr plays,
Oft hath thy bard beguiled his leisure hours
And drowned in song the griefs of other days,
Pillow his weary limbs amongst thy flowers.
His dreams of hope are gone, but, Murray, thou
Hast filled the breach up in a wounded heart;
He fain with thee would link himself, and now
It seems as though we never more should part.
If, when cold death shall come with chilly hand,
And his pale mantle o’er this frame shall spread,
This mortal clay may mingle with thy sand,
And thy bright water roll above his head,
He will not envy wealth the costly urns
That pride, ambition fill with nobler dust.
A peasant deified the name of Burns,
And wrought a lyric crown for plebian rust.

Yes, Bums, thou bard of nature, the cold earth
Was all too chilly for thy native fire -
Nipt in its frozen atmosphere at birth,
The warm emotions trembled on thy lyre,
Nathless they were a sweet and cheering strain,
A most engaging symphony of words.
Such as the earth shall scarcely hear again -
Nor lacks it aught; my simple verse affords
All fancies, both of good and bad intent.
We groan o’er “Willie’s” most unholy “Prayer” -
Our inmost soul responds to thy “Lament” -
Anti every song of jest, and mirth, and care,
And pious, or profane, thy Scotland’s page
Enrolls them all amongst her poesy -
A precious heir-loom to her future age,
The gem of Albyn’s ancient minstrelsy.

Yes, bard of low degree, thy numbers move
To tears, to joy, to passion, or emprise,
And e’en the heart, by sorrow bow’d, can soothe,
And bind it round again with human Lies.
Though dead, thou livest in thy lyre, whose sense
Speaks to the mortal ear in kindred tones;
And for thy own, all worthy recompense,
Exacts the homage of Britannia’s sons.
Thine is a living sepulchre, though past
The poet’s visions and Time’s restless hours;
Thou, dying, o’er thy country’s brows didst cast
A blooming garland of immortal flowers.
So, if my Murray, this unstudied rhyme,
Thy future children conning o’er, may deem
A curious picture of the olden time -
Then will the goal be won, the purpose of our theme.

The crew returned with a supply of game,
The kettle soon was emptied of the tea,
The sticker-up, which, broiled before the flame,
Did, with the ash-baked damper, well agree.
All these consumed with relish and a grace,
Which, if not said by hungry folks, is meant -
And having rinsed his hands and hairy face,
Alcibiades, to the boat, the natives sent.
Some the tarpaulin, some the oars and sail -
By which his simple tent was nightly made -
Did carry down the bank, and one did bale
The water out, and all in order laid.
When everything was placed on board, and stowed
Under the sheets, and fore and aft the boat,
They shoved off with their ashen oars, and rowed
Clear of the point, and in mid lake did float.

Farewell to Taipang, as the sail aloft
Forced the light whale-boat through the shining lake,
With gentle winds, that blew in breezes soft,
And not a ripple on its breast did make.
Gliding so swiftly and so smoothly past,
As if by magic o’er its basin led,
The cliffs grew dim behind and fading fast,
They gained on Churcherrwa’s 21 opposing head,

And plainly marked the land that runs along
From Churcherriwa unto the Cadongs 22 mouth,
The wild and barren flats of Toolarong, 23
That bound its waters, coming from the south.
Alcibius bade - “Tarrunkie, come and steer;
Cheraboc, strike a light, that I may smoke;
Tell me, who made the world and all that’s here!”
Who thus in song, the old tradition spoke:

’Twas very many years ago
When Ooroondooil 24 came -
Before the earth began to grow,
Or fire had burst a flame.

Great ocean, then, had ever been
Without a fish or shell
Unruffled in its glassy sheen -
Calmed in eternal spell.

The sun had not begun his course,
Fixed in the Heaven above -
His beams then lacked their burning force
Mild as the beams of love.

No cloud had dimm’d the heavenly blue,
No star had twinkled there;
Nor storm nor tempest ever threw
Discord amid the air.

At peace, the untumultuous sea
Sounded upon no shore;
The wind had not begun to be,
Nor wave had rippled o’er.

Then, from the bosom of the deep,
A mighty spirit came,
Rising, in wonder from its sleep,
Emerged his giant frame.

The silent waters, moved, and time
Began to walk in space;
The world revolved, and zone and clime
Followed its yearly pace.

The sun gave heat and life, the sky
Absorbed the vital power;
Breezes did o’er the ocean fly,
And passing clouds did shower.
Ooroondooil wrung his dripping hair,
The sunshine lent its ray,
And curled his locks in ringlets fair,
With which the winds did play.

Alone he stood; the world around
Was empty, but for him,
And everywhere the vault did bound –
The sea, the sun, and him.

He looked on heaven, and sea, and sun,
Which were beneath his will,
And felt a solitary one -
A void, so vast to fill.

He stooped and breathed upon the main,
Aloft his raised his form -
No longer could the winds refrain,
But burst abroad in storm.

The gathering clouds, of frowning black,
Drove the rude tempest on;
The thunder charges loudly crack,
And roll the waves upon.

Wave over wave, with topping crest,
Like snow drifts, speck the blue -
Across the ocean’s new-born breast
The strife of waters flew.

“Awake, and cast your dreams aside,
Ye spirits, who obey
Throughout my empire, far and wide,
That never lacks the day.

Awake! Ooroondooil calls, the world
Is a blank lonely spot,
Within whose hidden depths enfurled
Lie all things, that are not.

Arise, ye powers of air and land,
Ye genii of the waves:
These do I give into your hand,
And quit your joyless caves!”

13 As the natives of the Lower Murray, with whose language I am partially acquainted, will be in Adelaide in the course of the month, I hope to get ready a copy of the poetry alluded to, in their Language, and a translation, so as to compare it with Captain Grey’s verses, in time for your next number. It may possibly prove interesting to your readers.

14 When hunting amidst the she-oaks, it is very common to disturb the white owl that sits in these trees during the day, and is very much puzzled which way to fly in the sun-light.

15 “Doe” is a term for a female kangaroo, and “joey” for the young one.

16 The old and large buck kangaroo is called a “boomer”; he cannot run fast, but is very cunning, and more often escapes than the younger ones.

17 From the middle of July to January, there are always a number of black swans moulting on Lake Alexandrina, and on the S.E. branch. As they cannot fly, they are easily pulled down in a canoe or a boat. The down of these birds is very fine and beautiful.

18 Wombat, a marsupial animal resembling a bear, but of a distinct genus, that lives and burrows in the ground. We believe this has been found to be the single living type of a large fossil animal.

19 The quantity of wild fowl of all sorts in the neighbourhood of the Lake exceeds all belief.

20 “Sticker-up,” a duck or piece of kangaroo, grilled on a stick stuck in the ground before a fire, as is commonly practised in travelling in the bush.
Churcherriwa - a high bluff point opposite Taipang, on the extremity of the peninsula that forms the western side of Lake Albert and the eastern side of the Cadong, or S.E. branch of Lake Alexandrina.

The native name of the Milmenyra nation for the S.E. branch of the Lake. Many circumstances render it probable that the Wimmeira of Major Mitchell empties itself into it by subterraneous channels, near Rivoli Bay, where extensive marshes appear to communicate with the end of the branch, which is dry, or only ankle deep, in the summer season.

Toolarong - the native name of the country to the S.W. of Churcherriwa, along the edge of the Lake.

Ooroondooil - the creator of the earth, and the chief deity of the Lower Murray tribes.

The conclusion of this legend in the next number.
DEAR SIR - I enclose you Part V. of the “Spirit of the Murray, containing the sequel of the “Legend of Ooroondooil.” A long continuation of ill-health has prevented me from sending it at an earlier period - and, indeed, may perhaps prevent me from preparing much more of the work for publication, and carrying it out as I once hoped to do. This appears to be a genuine tradition of the Lower Murray or Lake tribes, and I believe is also to be found amongst the Encounter Bay natives. This circumstance will lend to the present version of it any interest the legend may have for the curious reader, since neither the style nor versification can boast of being attractive or excellent in any way. The author felt the difficulty of his task in narrating events which afford so free scope for embellishment of the imagination, by the simple voice of the native, as a regard to propriety necessarily confined him to the expression of ideas by words, and in a manner suitable to the character and intellectual condition of the narrator. He appears to have avoided the ridiculous at any rate, and, instead of filling the mouth of the savage with high-flown sentences and too much sentimentality, has preferred adhering to nature, and exhibiting a faithful outline of the native genius and habit of thought in this record of a literature of which, perhaps, in time to come, these scraps will be the sole remnants.

The author alluding to his foundation for this story, in a note appended to these papers, says:— “The foundation for this legend I obtained from two native boys, who were left with me one day when I was ill. One of them belonged to the Currency Creek, and the other to the Watirong tribe. I asked one of them ‘how the Earth came to be?’ He answered ‘that there was no Earth at first, only water.’ I then inquired, ‘who made the land?’ and, to a series of questions, received from one and the other the following particulars. The narratives were contained in little interlocutory tales, which the boys said their mothers and the old women were accustomed to tell them. There were some parts of these tales which highly excited the mirth of my companions, even at the expense of Ooroondooil himself. It would be useless to follow them through all the stories, even if one could recollect them; I could not see the drift of their merriment, but gathered the principal facts. That Ooroondooil, the maker of the world, with three or four other spirits, woke up and found nothing but water. Ooroondooil made a piece of land, and they all got upon it. The names of the spirits who were with him were very much the same as those I have adopted, and referred to their several destinations, as ‘Pereukie,’ over the fire; ‘Yilga,’ over the sea, &c. After some talk (very amusing), one of them complained of being hungry; and all this ends in Ooroondooil ordering each of the parties to make clothes, &c. Another complained of being cold; and all this ends in Ooroondooil ordering each of the parties to make and bring the respective contribution to the general comfort, over which it would afterwards be his province to preside; as fire, wood, water, &c. He then sent them away over the world, which he extended, to look after their several dominions, and came, himself, creating from the east. He made the Big Murray, or Eastern tribes first, and then the Lower Murray people; teaching them all the arts of life that they possess, and instructing them in the knowledge of their mysteries, and in those rites which they still continue to observe. After he had made all there is in this country, he left it, by swimming, to make other lands. Two of his lubras, who tried to follow him, were drowned and turned into the two islands, called ‘The Pages’ at the entrance to the Backstairs Passage, at the east of Kangaroo Island. He made Kangaroo Island (Kukakun) rise out of the sea, and went on making countries to the westward; where he still lives, though, by this time, a very old man. Some imagine he is become a white man, and has taught the Europeans the use of firearms, how to work, and bring clothes, &c.”

This being the origin of the story our author has put into the dialogue of his native companions, we may excuse the want of elegance in composition in the interest authenticity imparts to it, and may be satisfied at its being narrated in a style adapted to the subject, and the low ideas of the Divine nature to which the perceptions of this benighted race appears limited. There are parts of the work descriptive of scenery and thoughts on the Murray beach, &c., nearly ready, which require compiling only, and which I hope to be able to send you, if health permit, without so long a delay as this last has been.

I remain, dear Sir,
Yours truly,

CUIQUE.

Port Lincoln, November 6th, 1843.
Which rose in majesty.

The lofty mountain-tops emerge,
   The little hills and plains -
Upon whose shore the foaming surge
   Should bound the earth’s domains.

“Awake, and cast your dreams aside,
   Ye spirits who obey,
Throughout my empire, far and wide,
   That never lacks the day!

Awake! Ooroondooil calls - the world
   Is a blank, lonely spot,
Within whose secret depths, enfurled,
   Lie all things, that are not.

Come forth!” he cried; the skies were riven,
   And cleft in twain the air,
And loud and fearful sounds were driven
   About and everywhere.

Light spreads where erst the gloom had been,
   The golden clouds divide;
Voices are heard, and forms are seen
   Uprising from the tide.

And gathered round Ooroondooil then,
   Amidst the hushing storms,
An ugly race, who are not men, 26
   Yet have their wants and forms.

They sought the newly-risen shore,
   Where life, besides, was none;
But, as it rose from ocean’s floor,
   Stood rocks and sands alone.

Hungry and chill, and tired withal,
   The spirits spake their lord -
‘Wherefore, 0 master, didst thou call.
   That we attend thy word?

“My children,” Ooroondooil said,
   “Behold the land and main!
Within this sphere your powers are laid;
   Each element sustain!

A separate realm I give to each,
   To rule and fill with life:
Beyond which limit none shall reach,
   Nor shall ye meet in strife.

Marma and Yilga o’er the sea,
   Pereukie tire and flame,
Yappa the land, and Wyerrie
   The stubborn winds shall tame.

Pereukie, make a spark and warm
   These cold and shivering frames;
Yappa, draw wood upon thine arm
   To catch the kindling flames.

Thou, Marma, to the sea descend,
And from the parent stock,
Fish of all kinds by Yilga send,
With sea-shells from the rock!

Then did the mighty forest rise,
With lesser bush around,
Midst shrubs and plants of every size
That root beneath the ground.

The opossum in the moonlight played
Upon the gum-tree bough;
The kangaroo and emu strayed,
And cropped the herbs below.

And everything that walks or sees,
That swims in stream or lake,
In sea, on earth, in air, on trees,
Ooroondooil bid them make.

Yilga he sent o’er plain and hill
To sink the ancient wells;
Marma, the sea with life to fill
Where’er the billow swells.

Wyerrie flocked the air with birds;
Yappa made creeping things,
And all the animals in herds,
And deadly snake that stings.

Pereukie reared the grass-tree’s head, 27
And caused its tear to run;
With fire its rising stalk he fed,
Drawn from the noon-day sun.

Lonely, again, Ooroondooil pines,
Wandering from shore to shore;
Lovely and vast around him shines
The world - yet lacks he more.

Long, long, bewildered was his brain
To find the peace he sought;
In doubt he to this day had been,
Perplexed with care and thought -

But, as he sat, beside a well,
Watching the wild-dove woo,
The lover told his tale so well,
Ooroondooil wiser grew.

‘And after all, am I,” he said,
“To learn from these poor doves,
That all this splendid world I’ve made
Is nought, but for their loves?

No longer, for the brutes alone,
Such joys this life shall yield;
But, from myself, a race shall come,
To share the unbounded field.

Just like myself, except in power,
The lords of all beside,
I give the earth its noblest dower,
Then take me to the tide.”
And, as he spoke, two lubras rose,
As comely as the doe;
Down by the well they all repose –
Ooroondooil ends his woe.

In time a youthful race came on –
Then they themselves were sires;
And soon Ooroondooil looked upon
His children’s countless fires.

He taught them how to chew the grass,
And twirl it on the thigh,
That the twist line may quickly pass
In coils behind to lie. 28

He taught them how to work the net
And fix the slender stakes,
And how its ample folds to set
When the fish shoreward takes.

To warp the sapling straight for spears,
Form their points sharp and well,
Barb them for game; when foe appears,
To fix the deadlier shell. 29

He showed them all our fathers knew,
And when he swam away,
O’er ocean other lands to strew,
He bid his lubras stay.

But two young girls would not be bid,
And dashed into the main
To follow, but their heads, soon hid,
Were never seen again.

Ooroondooil rose up Kukakun, 30
And waited on a rock;
His wives’ two bodies floated soon,
Their husband’s word to mock.

He changed them into isles, that stand
Still in the ancient spot;
We plainly see them from the land,
And mourn their hapless lot.

Then he went on his cheerless way,
Towards the setting sun;
Though old, he lives unto this day –
His life is scarce begun.

26. These beings answer rather to the character of magicians, being objects of dread, rather from their supposed power, than as agents of positive evil.

27. The grass-tree (Xanthorrhoea) is one of the most useful of the indigenous productions to the Australian native. It is the sole means he has of obtaining fire, by friction of its dry, pithy stalk. The “tear” exudes in the form of a gum-resin amongst the roots of the leaves; also from the seed-vessels. The whole plant abounds in resin, and is very inflammable. This resin, mixed with some other gum or dark substance, makes one of the strongest cements of this description that I have seen. The natives use it for general purposes, for fixing shell and glass on their battle-spears, and for cementing bits of shell over the sutures of the skulls of their deceased relations, to render them capable of holding water, to which purpose they commonly apply them.

28. The natives make lines by letting a species of grass or flag that grows near the beach macerate in water for some time, and then separate the fibres by chewing it. They then twist it into line by a peculiar motion of the hand on the thigh. This twine, when well made, is a very strong and neat manufacture.
“Deadlier shell.” The spears used in fighting are armed with pieces of sharp shell, quartz, or (since Europeans have come amongst them) bottle-glass, which are fixed with cement in a groove on each side the point, so as to form a jagged, sharp, and very fatal sort of barb. Those with so many barbs are intended for hunting kangaroo, &c., and for striking large fish.

“Kukakun.” The native name for Kangaroo Island.