

The Australian native, whether he is civilised by cattle and sheep station owners, or missions, or whether he comes into civilisation from his own wild areas, has one dreadful fear that never leaves him - the fear of "bone pointing." Quite recently a native tracker, civilised enough to have been attached to a police station, laid himself down and died because an enemy had "pointed" a magic bone at him.

Every little group that has come down to me out of the wilds has brought with it some magic "pointing" object, both of wood and bone and stone. The pointing bones are arm, leg, collar or forehead bones taken from the body of a killed and eaten man, and I have handled many such bones that have become like polished ivory through the years, nay, generations, of their use by the group that owned them.

It is the most fatal of all magic because of its invisibility. The victim never sees the magic coming, but he feels a sudden unusual pain and cries out, "Maa'mu," ("Magic, eaten man's bone,") and from that moment he steadily wastes away and dies in a week or month according to the deadliness of the magic. No resistance can be made to magic.

One of my tasks when a new mob arrives is to find out how many death-dealing magic bones have been brought down, and to secure these by barter, though I always find out later that one or two have been retained by the group for its own safety in the new country and among the civilised derelicts that preceded it. For many years I tried to obtain a polished forehead bone possessed by a family that had come down from the border of South and West Australia in 1920, but as its potency as a "magic killer" was recognised throughout all the civilised area extending from Kalgoorlie to Port Augusta, and over the great Nullarbor Plain, its owners would not part with it. As they became "civilised" they were able to hire out the bone "on loan" only, to brothers wanting it for an evil purpose. I have seen it in possession of several persons who had hired it from its owner Beerajoogoor.

The forehead bone was oblong in shape, about 2½" by 1½". It was hung at the back from a neck string, and prevented treacherous spearing and was always conspicuous among the group in temporary possession of it. It has been a deadly weapon for thousands of generations and is one of the most potent factors in the slow but inevitable decline of the Australian native. Any illness that cannot be accounted for is magic illness and no effort is made to combat it. Now and again through the centuries men claimed sorcerership and taught themselves simple conjuring tricks such as pulling out bones, stones, pieces of wood, etc. from the seat of pain, and some became very clever at this game and were called in by other groups, when any of their members had fallen victims to magic. Suction by the sorcerer over the seat of pain brought forth the stone or wood that had been invisibly injected into some vital spot and if the patient recovered he purchased the piece of magic and the sorcerer's fame increased. If in spite of his services the patient succumbed, it was because a more powerful sorcerer belonged to the group that sent the magic.

One instance of a sorcerer healing a tiny white child was related to me by the mother of the child. The family lived on a little sheep farm several miles from civilisation and the baby suddenly became alarmingly ill. The sorcerer had been an old retainer for many years at the farm, but until the baby's sudden illness had not mentioned his sorcerership. He said to the mother, "I will make baby all right if you let me touch him," and the mother consented and the sorcerer proceeded to massage the baby's body until its sudden shrinking told him where the magic lay. Then he applied suction and brought away a quantity of pus such as an abscess or some such internal disorder would accumulate. The baby recovered completely and the grateful family kept him in comfort throughout his life.