BOOMERANG LEGS AND YAWS

IN

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINES

WITH

A DESCRIPTION OF BONE LESIONS

RESULTING FROM YAWS.

- b y -

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In two volumes.

VOLUME I.

(THESIS)

(With illustrations and two maps).

Thesis presented for the Degree of M. D. in the University of Adelaide.

ADELAIDE;

JULY, 1935.
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SECTION I.

INTRODUCTION.

One is often surprised, on becoming interested in some aspects of a problem, to find that although many years may have elapsed since its existence was noted, little progress has been made towards its elucidation. This has occurred in the etiology of "Boomerang leg". This condition, as far as one can ascertain, was first reported by Stirling (1894). He had seen natives with this condition in Central Australia while he was a member of the Horn Scientific Expedition. Watson knew of the condition both in Central Australia (Gardner, 1895) and in the New Hebrides (Stirling, 1894 and 1896).

Since that time many interested people have observed the condition, as would be expected. So characteristic is the appearance in marked cases and so wide the distribution that many who have lived in the Central or Northern areas of Australia for any length of time have seen one or more examples. The popular explanation of the condition, sometimes attributed to the natives themselves (Basedow, 1932), is that the growing child's legs protrude over the end of the wooden vessel in which it is carried, and gravity brings about the bending (Fig. 1). This mechanism does not take into consideration the fact that the deformity is rarely seen until the child has reached an age when it has far outgrown this means of transport. The natives account for the condition in many ways, attributing it in some localities to snake bite (or evil influences) and in others to failure of the mid-wife to straighten the shins properly at birth.

In Section VI, dealing with references in the literature to "Boomerang legs", it will be seen that the first to offer a reasonable suggestion of the etiology of
this condition was HERMANS (1928), who compared the sabre-
tibia of yaws seen in Equatorial Africa with "Boomerang
legs" in Australia.

The studies, which are outlined below, were under-
taken with the purpose of testing the validity of the
association of certain pathological changes with "Boomer-
ang legs".