

But it is not only in tragic situations calling for courage, endurance and loyalty that aborigines have distinguished themselves. They have added even to Australia's sporting traditions. With our Australian Test cricket team now in England it is interesting to recall that, 10 years before the first non-aboriginal Australian cricket team visited England, a team of aboriginal cricketers went there in 1868. Of 47 matches which they played they won 14, lost 14 and 19 were drawn. Outstanding in this team was all-rounder Johnny Murtagh, who scored 1,679 runs and took 245 wickets.

### WHO ARE THE ABORIGINES?

What manner of people are these who can thus rise to heights of gallantry, who can show extraordinary devotion and loyalty, who have proved themselves fine sportsmen, who have exacted, from people who have known them well, the highest praise?

They are a slender, brown-skinned people—now making up only about 80,000 of Australia's population of over 10,000,000—who many centuries ago came to Australia by way of the islands to the north and spread gradually over the whole continent, living in small tribal groups. They were never very numerous. It has been estimated that, when European settlement began, there were only about 300,000 in Australia. They moved continually within well-defined tribal areas in search of food and water.

The aborigines found little to assist them to develop a material culture—there were no edible grains they could cultivate, no animals they could domesticate, no opportunities for cultural interchange with neighbouring people. But they adapted themselves in a relatively harmonious fashion to a harsh environment. They hunted animals, caught fish and gathered vegetable foods. Their way of life meant that they established no permanent settlements and developed no large communities.

Despite their primitive material culture, the aborigines built up highly complex rules to regulate their lives, a profound spiritual culture, and distinctive art forms. They were simple people, shy rather than aggressive,



In song and dance, tribal aborigines acted out their myths and legends



capable of extraordinary feats of endurance and intensely loyal within their totemic, clan or tribal group. Their moral, ethical and social values differed greatly from those of the European settlers. They gave only token resistance to the spread of settlement, but this spread meant the loss of their old way of life to many of them and disruption in varying degrees for many others. They were forced to leave ancient and sacred tribal areas, to develop new ways of life.

Although aborigines and settlers originally bore each other little ill will, their interests clashed and inevitably there were some conflicts. The tide of settlement flowed on; the aboriginal way of life ebbed away.

Today only a few aborigines live in essentially the same way as their ancestors did and these only in the most remote parts.

A greater number, while still leading a nomadic life, are in regular touch with Government and Mission Stations, calling in for rations, to do some seasonal work, and occasionally for medical assistance. Many of these people, while still going on "walkabout", leave their children to attend settlement schools.

Other aborigines, although still retaining much of the aboriginal way of life, have settled down more or less permanently on Government and Mission settlements, away from the main centres of population, working at the settlement or on nearby properties, some with permanent dwellings, sending their children regularly to the settlement school. These people enjoy regular health services, have the advantage of guidance in nutrition, child care and hygiene, and are trained for employment.

Probably the greatest numbers of aborigines and part-aborigines today are "fringe dwellers". These are people who live on settlements or in shanty communities on the outskirts of towns, in somewhat irregular employment (usually unskilled), with the regular education, health and other services available to them. By and large, however, they suffer from distinct disadvantages which more primitive aboriginal people do not experience, principally social problems of acceptance and recognition by the community at large.