

*On an unusual form of RUSH BASKET from the NORTHERN TERRITORY of SOUTH AUSTRALIA.* By R. ETHERIDGE, JUN.

[WITH PLATE XVII.]

A VERY interesting and unusual type of rush basket has lately come under my notice, from the Northern Territory of South Australia. For an opportunity of describing this abnormal shape amongst Australian baskets, I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Harry Stockdale, of Sydney, the Northern Territory explorer and hunter. It was obtained from the Alligator Rivers Tribe, a people inhabiting the country watered by the three rivers of that name flowing into the south-east corner of Van Diemen's Gulf (lat.  $12^{\circ} 0' S.$ , long.  $132^{\circ} 0' E.$ ). The basket is peculiar by reason of its crumpled, bell-shaped mouth and ornate colouring.

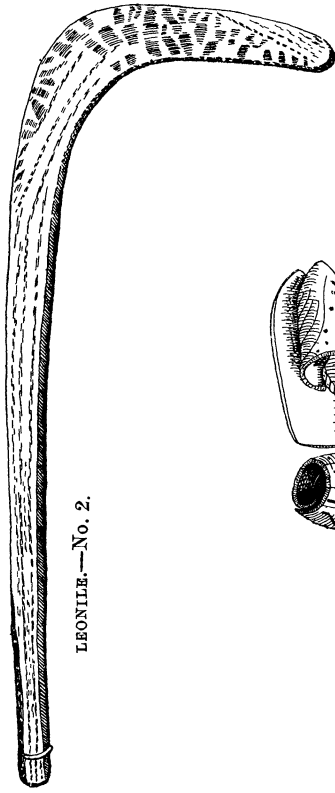
With few exceptions the neat-made baskets of the Australian aborigines are wide, open-mouthed receptacles, and are either circular and truncated, flat-bottomed and straight-sided, or even slightly tapering, when they are known in the south as *Kal-later*<sup>1</sup>; or flat and circular, with a contracted mouth on the side, called in South Australia, *Pol-la-da-noo-ko*;<sup>2</sup> or, of the North Queensland type, large, wide, bulging, open-mouthed, and more or less flexible, with curved semi-cuneate bases.<sup>3</sup>

In the present instance the basket is cylindrical, narrow, and practically flat-bottomed, sufficiently so to enable it to stand alone, decreasing in size upwards to a comparatively narrow neck, and then expanding to a somewhat crumpled, bell-shaped mouth, with one diameter greater than the other. The width at the bottom, which is slightly inflated, is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches; at the neck,  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches; and across the expanded mouth, 5 inches; the height is  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches. The proportions and colouring, although simple and conventional, by no means display a lack of taste on the part of the aboriginal maker. The material of which the basket is made is evidently a small rush, or coarse grass, and its structure consists of a series of "stakes," close and parallel, intertwined alternately over and under by thinner "siding" of the same material. The "stakes" have an average width of rather more than one-sixteenth of an inch, whilst that of the "siding" is less. The "stakes" are practically close together, but as the bottom is receded from, an almost imperceptible widening out takes place, so as to form the expanded mouth, but the spacing of the "siding" is remarkably regular and well kept. The edge

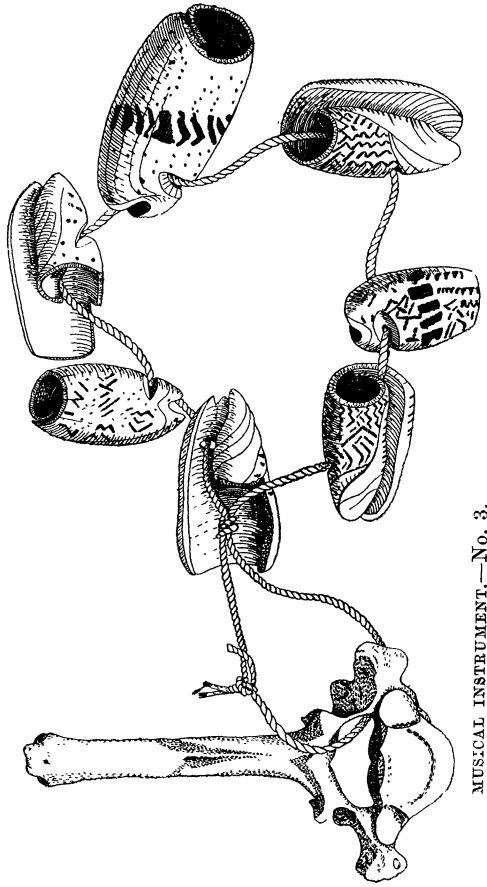
<sup>1</sup> Eyre, "Journ. Exped. Discovery into Central Australia," 1845, ii, p. 512.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1845, ii, p. 512.

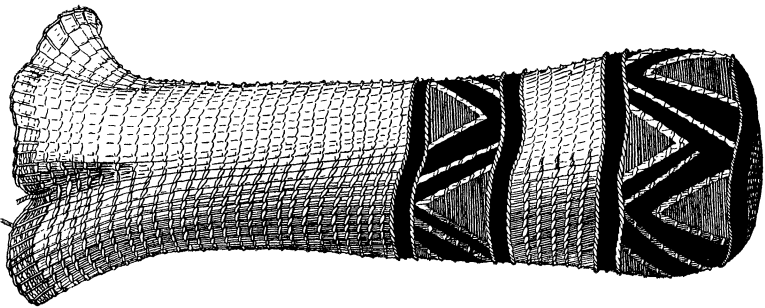
<sup>3</sup> Lumholtz, "Amongst Cannibals," 1890, pp. 190, 195, and 276.



LEONILE.—No. 2.



MUSICAL INSTRUMENT.—No. 3.



RUSH BASKET.—No. 1.

of the mouth is guarded by a margin of bistrand string, made of beaten and twisted fibre, and this is also whipped over and over the immediate periphery of the basket to a depth of three-eighths of an inch. Immediately below this, by bringing the three uppermost sidings together, a series of holes is left, thus giving a better definition, or finish to the mouth-edge, and forming an open sub-marginal band. (No. 1.)

The colouring is remarkably well effected. In the first place there are four concentric narrow black bands, from two to three-eighths of an inch wide, gradually becoming further apart from the base upwards, and defended at each edge, top and bottom, by a raised rim of interlaced native string. These black bands separate the surface of the basket into three rather unequal zones. The uppermost of the black bands is six inches from the mouth margin, and the whole of this space is plastered with white pipe-clay. The lowest black band forms the periphery of the flat bottom of the basket. The latter and the second zone are also coated with white pipe-clay; but the first and third, or bottom, zone are divided into triangular spaces, by black and white lines. The bottom zone contains eight of these triangular spaces, and the top zone six. Each triangle is first margined by a narrow white pipe-clay line, then a broader black line, or almost band, again followed by another white line. The triangles have their apices alternately directed upwards and downwards, and are not all of equal size. They are coloured a deep Indian red, and present a slightly sparkling appearance, from the presence of mica scales in the clay from which the pigment has been prepared. It is quite evident that both the top and bottom zones containing these triangular spaces were first wholly coloured Indian red, and then the black and white lines painted over the latter pigment. The basket is remarkably light, weighing only  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ounces. With regard to its special use, I am unable to afford any definite information, but both its construction and lightness would appear to indicate that it could not have been put to any great degree of rough usage.

The Alligator Rivers Tribe, from which this basket emanates, appear to have been great adepts in the manufacture and colouring of these weapons and utensils. I have lately had the pleasure of examining a large series of these, and they all bear out this view.<sup>1</sup>

I am indebted to my colleague, Mr. Charles Hedley, F.L.S., for the accompanying excellent drawing of the basket.

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<sup>1</sup> See the forthcoming "Macleay Memorial Volume" of the Linnean Society of New South Wales.