

## A WILD MAN OF THE NEWCASTLE FOREST.

Philosophers in all ages have disputed whether a state of nature or of civilization is the more favourable to the production of virtues. By some it has been asserted that the simplicity of savage life affords the only opportunity for its practice, while others have as strenuously insisted that nothing but the cultivation of the arts of polished society can give birth to any of the qualities which raise man above the level of the brute creation. It would be equally unsafe to espouse the opinion of either in an unlimited degree. The savage may be free from hypocrisy, worldly insincerity, insanity, of avarice or baseness, or 'sagratitudes, but sloth, cruelty, revenge, and treachery, all the dark passions of the human breast, unless corrected by the hand of education, are the systems of uncivilized communities. It is a melancholy truth that in almost all cases where the people of newly-discovered regions have been thrown into communication with Europeans they have imbibed all the worst vices of their instructors without receiving one virtue of civilized life in exchange for these: they have lost by the intercourse. No race of men have furnished a stronger illustration of this fact than the aborigines of this colony. It is impossible to conceive human nature lower in the scale of depravity than the few tribes who have escaped extermination to live among the colonists. Utterly sunk in filth and intemperance, they have not preserved one spark of the warlike spirit of their fathers or any resemblance to the hardy and untamable bands who so long resisted the early colonists. Unhappily, they have been made to vanish before the march of civilization as "snow before a sunbeam," still there are some circumstances of a singular and highly interesting nature which deserve recording. Here is a remarkable incident connected with the Newcastle district bush natives. On 22nd June, 1861, Messrs Barrallier and Mr. Bower, the second mate of the *Lord Nelson*,

went on shore at the site of Newcastle, and in the forest encountered a native who was full of fun and frolic. After some little persuasion he accompanied them on board the vessel. He was an elderly man of the class called Bush-natives, who are an inferior tribe to those inhabiting the sea-coast. His legs and arms bore no proportion to the length of the rest of his body, and the manner of ascending the ship's ladder was so remarkable that it provoked much surprise and laughter. It plainly proved he was much accustomed to climbing for his method was to stretch out his long arms as far as he could reach, and then draw his feet up to the same place with a jerk. As King Dungee had deserted the survey party on the first day of landing, presumably to visit his kindred residing Newcastle side of Brisbane Water, Colonel Paterson's party could make nothing of the strange Bush-native, for he appeared to be further removed from the human race than any being they had ever beheld. His language was unintelligible to all on board, and the sounds he uttered were strangely unsmooth and dissonant, although some tones were plaintive, but without the least similitude to human speech. He was in a state of nudity, and, unlike most of other natives, his teeth were perfect. It is the usage of all natives along the coast to have two of the incisors of the upper jaw eradicated at an early period of their lives, and also to have a stick thrust through the cartilage of the nose as an ornament. This singular being had no trace of these rites, and he would neither eat nor drink, but kept constantly mimicking what he heard others say or do. Knowing how fond the natives are of bush honey, Lieutenant Grant offered him some sugar, but he would not even taste it. The ship's barber appeared, and after shaving a seaman the sable stranger submitted to have his beard cut off. As he was adverse to eating, and drinking on board the vessel, Lieutenant Grant determined to put him ashore. Just as he was on the point of doing so the native espied a crow of the carrion species, which one of the crew had shot. This he expressed

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by signs a longing desire for, and no sooner was it presented to him than he took it to the galley fire. Here he roasted it a while, and then greedily devoured it, entrails and all. It was presumed he had been associated with the runaway convicts, for he gladly received some biscuits, of which all the natives were passionately fond. Colonel Paterson took him ashore, where he presented him with a small tomakaw, which he placed under his arm. The boat's crew desiring to see a proof of his dexterity in the use of his new acquisition pointed to a tree as if they wished him to climb it. He readily comprehended what they meant, and approached a stupendous gum tree (*Eucalyptus globulus*) attaining the height of nearly 180ft, with a diameter of nearly 50ft, possessing a straight cylindrical barrel rising fully 100ft without sending out a branch. The physical power and dexterity displayed by the 'lynx-eyed native in mounting this thick tree, which towered like a lofty steeple, was a most extraordinary feat. With the new tomahawk, and by a rapid action of the wrist, he made a notch in the bark of the tree of sufficient depth and size to admit the ball of his great toe. Embracing the tree with his left arm, he adroitly raised himself to this notch, and there rested the ball of the great toe of the right foot. He then cut a notch above his shoulder (cutting with the right hand and clinging with the left, casting the whole weight of his body on the ball of the left toe), and quickly ascended to this notch, repeating the process until he reached the top, exhibiting a wonderful absence of all fear of danger as well as an astonishing stretch and pliancy of limb. This independent use of the great toe, like the throwing of the boomerang, is an Australian characteristic, and natives when horse-riding rest the toe in the stirrup instead of inserting the entire foot. As soon as the bush native reached the top he seized a branch and nimbly swung himself to another tree, and then onward to another tree until he disappeared from sight. Colonel Paterson noticed that most of the big trees were notched by

the natives' stone hatchets, and some of the notches were made by the gins of the black men in collecting the honey of the stingless bee. The colonel declared he never saw a native who differed so much from the rest of the New Hollanders. Lieutenant Grant writes:—"As there is thought to be a chasm in creation beginning with the brute and ending with man, were I inclined to pursue the notion I should be at a loss where to place my Bush-native—whether in the next link above the monkey or that below it."

#### NEWCASTLE AS A FISHING PORT.

Colonel Paterson was so deeply sensible of the value of the sea and river fisheries of Newcastle as to recommend them to the notice of Governor King for the establishment of the place as a fishing port. Under date June 25th, 1801, he writes: "There is such abundance of fish that a few industrious fishermen might in the course of the cold season load several vessels with excellent fish." The great industries for securing fish for human food were then in their infancy, and are still so to-day, for the enormous value of the fisheries is little understood. It is interesting to record the harbour fishing of the survey party, in June, 1801, upwards of 96 years ago. According to Lieutenant Grant: "Fish was taken in great quantity, and of various kinds, particularly mullet (called by the Newcastle blacks *wet-ta-wong*), which were large and well flavoured." Grant in another part of his diary remarks: "We caught also a species of Jew fish, one of which weighed 56lb, and proved excellent eating. From the numbers of this fish which escaped from the seine I am inclined to think there is great plenty in this river." The survey party's first great haul of fish was made on June 17th, 1801, when Colonel Paterson recorded in his journal: "Some of the people were employed to-day hauling the seine. Found quantities of fish and great variety." Here is a list of the variety of fish caught, with their Newcastle native names in brackets:—Black bream (*yu-rain*), the large schnapper (*kur-rung-kum*), the small schnapper

(mut-tau-ra), flathead (to-pa-ta-ra), the large whiting (ka-ro-barra), the bream fish (tu-rea), the sea salmon (pur-ri-mun-kan), and the large mullet (wot-ta-wong). The blacks' general name for fish was ma-ko-ro; the sea beach, wambui; the spear for fish, muting; a shark, kurra-ko-i-yong; the cat fish be-a-ta; the sea slug or blubber, pun-bung; and the fresh water eel, ka-nin. There is a red sea slug which attaches itself to rocks, and called by Europeans kun-ge-wy, but this is a barbarism as the Newcastle blacks called it bun-run. The blacks gave the name bera-buk-kin to the sperm whale, which they did not eat, but of the black whale they were fond. The time is not far distant when the wealth received from our coastal fisheries will be very great, for the great extent of seaboard, altogether neglected, capable of being worked for its sources of valuable food delicacies are nowadays coming into repute. The Scottish sea fishery employs 15,000 boats with 50,000 men and boys, and gives direct employment to 90,000 persons. Australia will do the same in the near future.