CHAPTER XVI

The initiation ceremony was one of the most important events in the ceremonial lives of the aborigines of the Hunter Valley, and is an instance of the unity of secular and religious aspects of life which was typical of the natives throughout the country. (1) The ceremony and connected rites involved growth in social and economic status as well as a gradual revelation of the sacred myths and objects of the tribe. A young man's initiation, over a period of years, involved tuition in hunting, fishing, self-control (2) and tribal responsibilities, and culminated with an education in tribal lore and tradition, and in a testing and ritual demonstration of these features of tribal life.

This ceremony of initiation, together with several other magico-religious practices, will be discussed in this chapter, attention being directed first to some of the general problems involved, then to the ceremonial grounds, and finally to the ceremonies themselves.

As with most other facets of aboriginal life, there are problems related to the settlers' descriptions:

(2) For example, by means of food totems. See above Chapter III.
they are few and imprecise with regard to both the ceremonial grounds and the actual ceremonies. An observation made by Catherine Berndt is pertinent:

"Much of the work that has been done on this set of topics, among the Aborigines, took place at a period when field methods and techniques were poorly developed and quite inadequate. Many investigators were unsystematic in their enquiries and observations, naively unaware of their own effect on the situations they were studying, and over-ready to indulge in speculation on the most slender basis." (3)

It was difficult for the early settlers to acquire any information on this subject, for the natives conducted their ceremonies in great secrecy, refusing to allow the uninitiated to witness them. (4) Illustrative of this is R. Miller's only reference to the initiation ceremony:

"The males were made young men with many secret ceremonies." (5)

Enright also learned little.

"I sojourned among the remnant of the Kuthung without being able to elicit from them anything more valuable than the reluctant admission that at the present time the youths are initiated at Forster." (6)

R.H. Mathews is an exception, providing what Enright (7) believed to be the first detailed account of the ceremony as practised in that area. (3)


(4) J.W. Bawsttt loc.cit; p115.

W. Scott op.cit; p32.

(5) R. Miller loc.cit; p173.

(6) W.J. Enright "The Initiation Ceremonies of the Aborigines of Port Stephens, N.S.W." "1899; p117.

(7) Ibid.

Mathews defines the area of the "Keaparra" ceremony of initiation as extending from Newcastle almost to the Macleay River, comprising approximately the counties of Macquarie, Hawes, Gloucester, and the eastern half of the county of Durham. (9) Inter-tribal contact was considerable, often expressly for the purpose of attending initiation ceremonies (10) and throughout the Hunter Valley the ceremonies appear to have been essentially similar. (11)

A ceremonial ground at Tinonee, near Taree, last used in 1839, is described by Mathews:

'The "Kackaroo", or public ring, was 130 yards S.50°E. from the right bank of Stony Creek on some level, thickly wooded country. The tribes who attended the ceremony camped around this ring, each tribe occupying the side nearest their own districts. Water for camp use was obtained from the creek referred to, and there were good hunting grounds all around.

The kackaroo consisted of an oval space 26 feet in the longest diameter by 23 feet across, bounded by a raised earthen embankment or wall, which was formerly about a foot high - the base of the wall being about 13 inches through. In one side of this embankment an opening, 3 feet wide, was left, from which a narrow pathway, "yup-pang", led away through the forest in a direction bearing S.40°W. for a distance of 370 yards to another and larger oval enclosure, called the "goonambang" (excrement place). This space was 31 feet by 26 feet, and was enclosed by an earthen wall similar to the one near the camp, and the path

(9) ELXX: 2720.
(10) See above, Chapter I.
Sketch of engraved tree near Gloucester. R. Etheridge Jr.

Sketch of Bore Ground near Gloucester. R. Etheridge Jr.
entered it through an opening left in its wall in the same way. The longest diameter of both these ovals ran in the direction of the pathway connecting them, and the embankment was continued a few feet outwards along each side of the pathway in both cases. In the middle of the second, or larger, enclosed space was a heap of earth about 4 feet in diameter at the base, and 10 inches high, on top of which a fire had been kept burning.\(^{12}\)

Scott refers to a similar type of site in the Port Stephens area, although he does not mention the smaller ring. It is possible that the aborigines did not want him to know of it, as he was uninitiated. He describes the ceremonial ground -

'There was the usual oval cleared space with the banked margin - and in the centre a heaped up conical fire.' \(^{13}\)

Some four miles north-east of Gresford, near Dungog, New South Wales, was another ceremonial ground, described by Mathews.

'Close to the eastern side of the general encampment was the "yackarroc", 40 feet by 29 feet, from which the "yupang" or path led away on a bearing of N.05\(^{\circ}\)E., ascending some sloping ground for a distance of 17 chains to the "goonambang", on the crest of a low ridge. The diameters of this oval space were 28 feet and 26 feet respectively, being smaller than the oval near the camp. The usual heap of earth on which the fire is kept burning was in the centre of this enclosure. \(^{14}\)

Generally surrounding trees were carved. Breton observed,

\(^{13}\) W. Scott loc. cit: p32.
\(^{14}\) R.H. Mathews loc. cit: p325.
The bark of any trees that may be near is carved into rude representations of different animals.¹ (19)

Fawcett refers to a ceremonial ground where the trees were carved -

"Here a couple of circular clearings were made, the trenches and brushwood being used in making a fence or hedge around them; a narrow path, also fenced in with bushes, connected them. Some of the trees in the neighbourhood were marked with rudely drawn cut animals, the totems or badges of the tribe, and designs, the meanings of which they would never disclose." (18)

Mathews describes the trees at the Timonee site in greater detail.

"A number of trees were marked around the "goonambong", some of them being just outside the embankment, and others nearly two chains distant from it. The devices upon them consisted of the curious marking called "dharrock" or "dharroong" by the natives, and were cut upon the bark only. The trees selected were grey gum (17) and spotted gum (16), the bark of which are (sic) smooth and soft, and well suited for the purpose. The "dharroong" extended from near the butts of the trees to an altitude varying from 6 feet to 22 feet up the hole or trunk. Most of the trees were marked all round the trunk, but some were ornamented only on the side facing the goonambong." (19)

On one tree, an ironbark (20), was carved a representation of an iguana. (21) The trees which once surrounded

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¹ T.H. Breton, loc.cit: p292.
² J.W. Fawcett, loc.cit: p156.
⁴ Eucalyptus nuculata, Ibid.
⁵ R.M. Mathews, loc.cit: p322.
⁷ R.M. Mathews loc.cit: p322.
Sketch of carved trees at the junction of the Page and Isis Rivers. A. MacDonald.

Sketch of carved trees near Gloucester. R. Etheridge Jr.
the Cresford site had been destroyed by bush fires when Mathews saw it. (22)

Carved trees (23) surrounded a 'circle on the ground resembling a circus ring', about a hundred yards in circumference, on "Kelvinside" near Aberdeen, (24) but by 1877 only the trees remained and the site was disused.

Further north was another ceremonial ground of a nature which suggests Kamilaroi influence.

'Near the junction of the rivers Page and Isis, tributaries of the Hunter, not far from the town of Aberdeen, Mr. Macdonald, a squatter of the place, showed me the spot where they held their bora. It was in a pleasant glen at the foot of one of the highest hills in the neighbourhood. On the ground is the rude figure of a man, formed by laying down sticks of wood and covering them with earth, so as to raise it from 4 to 7 inches above the level of the ground. It is 22 feet long, 12 feet wide from hand to hand.' (25)

According to Mathews it was a Kamilaroi custom to construct figures of men and animals by heaping up loose earth. (26)

There was one circle, built up about the edges, at Mr. Macdonald's site. It was about 150 yards in circumference with a fire in the centre. (27) There were also many carved trees.

'Round about this place for some considerable distance, are about one hundred and twenty trees marked with tomahawks ... (28) on some the marks reach as high as fifteen feet above the ground.' (29)
Mathews describes the type of ceremonial grounds used by the natives occupying the coastal area south of the Hunter River. This initiation ground, while basically the same as in other areas, had distinctive characteristics. There were the usual two circles, joined by a path from a quarter to half a mile long, depending on the nature of the ground.

"Inside the farther (smaller) ring were a few posts, about four feet high, prepared in the following manner. Some straight saplings, about three or four inches in diameter, were cut in lengths of about five feet, and the bark taken off them. Holes were then dug in the floor of the ring, about a foot deep, into which the posts were inserted, and rammed to make them firm. Sometimes there were only two of these stumps, on other occasions three, and on others four... At the base of each post a white stone was laid on the ground, and a string was stretched from the top of each post to the top of the one next it." (30)

Blood was rubbed on the stumps erected inside the ring.

Nearby were figures on the ground similar to those earlier referred to.

"A short distance from the circle was a colossal representation of "Burramanho," (31), lying prone on his back, formed of the loose earth heaped up in high relief, and having a quartz crystal laid on his forehead. A little way further was another raised image, also lying on the back, but of smaller dimensions, with a "coolamin" containing human blood... lying on his breast. There was another human figure lying near these, about life size, and formed in the same way. The surface of the ground on both sides of the track near these images was ornamented with..." (30)

(30) A.H. Mathews "The Burial of the Burial Ring" (30)
(31) Probably some supernatural being. Mathews does not enlarge.
the usual... devices cut into the soil... Among
these carvings may be mentioned a porcupine, a
dog, the sun with rays, and the moon both in the
crescent end at full.' (32)

At Port Stephens the natives sometimes had a wooden
figure inside the circle.

'Within the cleared space, and on one side of it,
was a rough figure painted red, made of wood,
formed by a stake driven in the ground with a
cross piece for arms and the 'cap' dressed up with
grass and bark, in the style used by the blacks
when prepared for hunting.' (33)

No indication is given as to the possible significance of
this figure. Dawson describes an object discovered in a
ceremonial ground near Port Stephens. He could not learn
of any superstition being attached to it, and thought it
was used merely as a common centre to dance round.

'Our natives also picked up something that
resembled a shield, only longer and of a more
circular form: it was made out of a piece of
bark from a tree called iron-bark, (nearly as
hard when dry as an English elm-board,) and as
smoothly worked up as if it had been done by a
carpenters plane... Not having seen anything
like it before, I had no idea what it was intended
for, but our natives informed me that it was fixed
upon a pole by the bush blacks, and set up at
their corrobories.' (34)

The ground where the object was found was unusual, too.

'The ground was made perfectly white by pine-clay,
and it was curiously chalked on its surface by
red ochre.' (35)

(32) A.W. Howitt op. cit: p.102-
(33) A.W. Howitt op. cit: p.1074-5. W. Scott is his source.
(34) R. Dawson op. cit: p.162.
(35) Ibid.
Dawson's discovery is the only one of its kind in the area, and it is impossible, therefore, to infer anything from it in relation to the general ceremonial life of the aborigines.

To revert to the more usual type of ceremonial ground, where there were circles, joined by a path, and with a fire in the centre. Local descriptions of grounds where there was just one ring are suspect, as it is impossible to be sure whether the early settlers are describing in insufficient detail a two-ring ceremonial ground, or a genuinely different type of ground with a single ring. Further up the coast there definitely were single ring sites, (36) so it is possible that there were in the Hunter Valley also. Nevertheless, it will be seen that the ceremonies performed on both types of ground were much the same.

The ceremonies are described in detail by Mathews, and more generally by others, amongst them Fawcett and Scott. What emerges from their accounts is that to the aboriginal there was no distinction between the secular and the religious. The descriptions indicate that the initiation ceremony was a formal declaration of the fact that in an economic, social and religious sense, a youth

had "come of age". Thus Matthews describes the displaying of sacred objects (crystals, carved trees and so on) to the initiates, and their education in the sacred myths and customs; but he also says that initiation involved their removal from the care of the women and acceptance into the young men's camp, and their being invested with the full dress and weapons of a man of the tribe.

Much of the time, according to Fawcett,

"was taken up in receiving instruction from the elders in the tribal laws, and in learning such things as were considered necessary to fit them for the duties of manhood." (37)

The boys had to demonstrate that they could be able warriors. Fawcett describes an arranged fight, where they had to give proof of their skill with the weapons of warfare." (36)

Also, they were given ritual instruction in matters with which in practice they were already familiar, for example the economically important problems of how to procure certain animals, and at what time of year.

Matthews refers to the initiation ceremony as the "Keperra Ceremony"; Enright uses the word "Kiparra". (39) A similar ceremony held at Port Macquarie was known as the "Kabarrah". (40) Scott speaks of the "Poombit" or "Bora"

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(36) Ibid.
(39) W.J. Enright "Notes on the Aborigines of the North Coast of New South Wales," p. 28.
ceremony at Port Stephens, and refers to the initiates as "yoombids". (41) Tarcoot calls the initiates "boombits", and the ceremony "Bocool". (42) The ceremony of the Darrinung, described by Mathews, (43) is the "Bubung" but nowhere does he refer to the initiates by name.

The following account of the initiation ceremony as held on the coast to the north of the Hunter River is largely from Mathews' article. (44) Additional and corroborating evidence from other sources is included.

Then there were sufficient boys old enough for initiation, the head man of the tribe whose turn it was to hold the ceremony, after consultation with the elders, sent messengers to all the tribes who were to be present. The messenger presented the neighbouring tribe with a small white quartz crystal, and if they accepted the invitation, he returned to his own tribe with another stone as token of their concurrence in the plan. The headman then selected a suitable place in his own territory where game was plentiful, and began to prepare the ground.

Another set of messengers was then sent off, this time bearing a bull-roarer, several tails or kilts, a

(41) W. Scott Smith: pp35-38.
belt, and other articles. These ceremonial objects were used throughout the Hunter Valley, and indeed throughout Australia. They were important for purposes of identification, as tribal boundaries were strictly observed, and unauthorized trespassing was hazardous. The objects were distributed amongst the men of the tribe, the headman receiving the bull-roarer, and then the messengers accompanied the tribe back to their own territory where the ceremony was to be held.

Before their arrival the waiting tribes painted themselves with white ochre in distinctive patterns. The messengers who had travelled with them went ahead to inform the host tribe of their arrival. Certain greeting ceremonies were enacted, and then visiting tribes set up camp in the area nearest to their own territory. These arrivals generally took place in the afternoon, a few hours before sundown, and were the occasion of much excitement and celebration.

"For some days previous to the date of the ceremony, members... of other tribes in the neighbourhood used to assemble in the district and receive a hearty welcome. The coming event was one of great importance, in fact, it was the most important incident in the life of each male Aboriginal. Great preparations were made and every day the welcome extended to visiting tribes became more demonstrative. Boomerangs and spears were made with special impetus, (sic) and the men painted themselves with fat until their skins glistened again, and ornamented their bodies with markings of red ochre and white pipeclay..."
Feasting and mirth and pleasure was then the order of the day for some time." (45)

On the appointed day the boys were removed from the camp and painted with red ochre and grease by their relatives or guardians. Then they were placed in the large ring, and their mothers and other women folk lay down near them, and were covered with cloaks and bushes. The guardians then led the novices away quietly, in a direction unknown to the women. This was obviously a ceremonial parting of the boys from their mothers, and their childhood.

The novices were then shown the sacred quartz crystals and the meanings of the carved trees were explained to them. The women departed, accompanied by some old men, and set up camp elsewhere, taking no further part in the ceremonies until their termination. The guardians led their charges several miles into the bush, and set up camp, where they remained for about a week.

The boys spent much of the time sitting with their heads down, eyes to the ground.

'For a certain period they had to sit on their hunches with their heads bent down between their legs... A sort of indifference to hunger and pain were practically enforced, and the boys were kept without food and in uncomfortable positions for long periods. When food was supplied..." (46)

(45) W.J. Rupert, "Arrival of 1842-43-45.
W.J. Enright loc. cit. p36, mentions a "ruddle ground" near No. 1 station, between Yowanda and Gloucester. "The ruddle ground is the place where the natives paint themselves with red ochre during the Miparra ceremony."
to then it was generally of the most nauseating
color. If any one of the boys showed any
undue impatience, or failed at any point of
importance, they were sent back to associate
with the women and young children, and had to
wait until the next harvest, or bark ceremony,
to be made men. (46)

Each night the guardians danced and initiated
animals, the boys sitting in a separate section of the
camp. By day they received tuition and were involved in
certain mystic ceremonies. They were then presented
with a bull-roarer and warned never to show it to a woman
or any uninitiated person, the penalty being death.

Before returning to the main camp, both men and
boys were painted with white pipeclay. The boys were
invested with the full regalia of a man of the tribe,
and the men also attired themselves in their tribal
 costume. On their return the novices and their guardians
were, with attendant ceremonies, held over green branches
on the fire prepared by the women, and smoked for a
certain length of time.

Several other ceremonies followed, including the
ritual of the last meeting between mother and son.

'Then each pemubit knelt before his mother, or
father, his nearest female relative, and went through the form of taking the breast
for the last time, thus typifying the putting
away of childish things and taking on the
responsibilities of manhood.' (47)

For the last night, the now initiates camped a short distance away from the main camp. They were given a piece of white crystal by the sorcery or medicine men. It was in a bag which the boys attached to their girdles.

The next day the visiting tribes dispersed, and the host tribe moved away to another part of their territory. The boys then entered on a period of probation, during which they were not allowed to eat certain foods, and could not associate with women.

'As soon as the bore ceremony was over the young men were sent off in search of adventure in some part of the country where there was no fear of their meeting any women, as they were not allowed to see a female for three or four months. During this time they were cast entirely, or almost so, on their own resources to procure food, form camps, and make their own rugs and weapons.' (43)

At the end of the probation period, which was fixed by the headmen, the initiates returned to the camp. Each night they camped a little closer to the single men, until they moved right into their camp. At last their period of initiation was over. They were free to marry, and

'As men they could eat the male animals, and partake of many which had previously been forbidden.' (49)

Mathews also describes an abridged form of initiation ceremony, the "Dhalgai Ceremony" (50) which was adopted.

(40) J. F. R. C. A. 1911-11-11: 279:
by these tribes. It was used only when there was no time,
or it was otherwise inconvenient to hold the complete
Keeperra ceremony. The Bhalgae involved the members of
only one tribe, and was of comparatively brief duration.
Otherwise it was essentially the same as the Keeperra.

The "Burfung", the initiation ceremony of the
Darringun tribes, (51) was very like the Keeperra ceremony.
The pattern was the same: a removal from the women, a
period of instruction and testing in the bush, and a
return as full tribal members. Mathews concludes

"On carefully studying the initiatory rites of
the tribes referred to, as described by me
elsewhere, traces of all their ceremonies are
distinguishable in the Burfung of the Darringun
tribes. (52)

The initiation ceremony, regarded as the most
important event in a native's life, made a deep impression
upon those who had experienced it.

"It is certain that most of those who have passed
through the Bora are profoundly impressed with a
sense of obligation to observe the moralities and
spiritualities there enumerated." (53)

Some of the early settlers refer to an additional
ceremony, which was part of the initiation. This was the
practice of removing a tooth. Dawson observed

(51) R.F. Mathews "The Burfung of the Darringun Tribes":
p31-12.
(52) Ibid: p12.
(53) C.C. Greenway loc. cit.: p43.
'Before a native is considered eligible to marry, he must lose one of his front teeth. On a day appointed, the family meet in some secluded part of the forest, where a kind of festival is held: the tooth upon this occasion is struck out... by placing a piece of stone in the form of a wedge against it, the then striking it sharply with a heavy stone.' (54)

A slightly different procedure at Port Stephens is described by Howitt. To quote Howitt:

'At Port Stephens the blacks when making a Bumbat, that is, when initiating a boy, remove a tooth, by one of the old men placing his bottom tooth against the Bumbat's upper tooth, and by giving a sudden jerk snaps the boy's tooth off.' (55)

The tooth was removed by a similar method at Port Macquarie. (56)

Miller (57) and Threlkeld (58) observed the custom at Maitland and Lake Macquarie, respectively, but teeth were apparently not removed near Gundy, in the Upper Hunter, for MacDonald wrote

'There is no knocking out of a tooth in this part of the country.' (59)

MacDonald was writing towards the end of the century, whereas the others were concerned with the 1840s and earlier, so it may be that the practice was discontinued.

(54) R. Dawson op. cit.: 5321.
(55) A. W. Howitt op. cit.: 5771. He quotes his reference as being A. H. Koelt.
(56) W. H. Bracun op. cit.: 5353.
(57) R. Miller loc. cit.: 5355.
(58) E. M. Threlkeld op. cit.: 24 (55)
(59) A. MacDonald loc. cit.: 5355.
after the natives had been exposed to white influence, or that it was just a local custom. Mathews concludes his description of the Keaparra ceremony with this observation.

'In some parts of the tract of country to which the ceremonies herein described apply, one of the front incisor teeth was formerly extracted during the time the novices were away at the MediaTek, but as this custom is not now enforced anywhere, I have not included it in this paper. From conversations I have had with very old blackfellows, there appear to be some grounds for supposing that the custom was not universally carried out in the districts referred to.' (50)

Another custom, related to initiation, was that of piercing the septum of the nose. Mathews does not refer to this. According to McKieran, a boy's nose was pierced when he was young, but he did not wear anything in the aperture until he had been initiated.

'The septum of a boy's nose was bored when quite young, for the use of the nose-peg when grown up. The nose-peg was considered a great ornament and in the early days no man would think of speaking to a stranger of importance without this decoration.' (61)

According to Miller the actual piercing of the nose was part of initiation. (62) Dawson wrote of the practice in some detail.

(61) A. McKieran loc. cit.: p. 336.
(62) R. Miller loc. cit.: p. 245.
'The ceremony of boxing beings takes place till they are at the age of puberty, and then they go away to some remote place, accompanied by several of their male friends, with the person who performs the operation, who is looked up to as a kind of doctor on other occasions. As soon as the cartilage is perforated, a small bundle of the clear round stems of vitreous grass is introduced into the orifice, which is extended every day by thrusting fresh stem into the centre of the bundle until it is increased to the required size... when the wound has been sufficiently distended, (which is sometimes done to a degree that occasions the cartilage to break,) the inflammation and soreness begins to subside, the grass is exchanged for a bone of about an inch and a half in circumference, from the leg of a kangaroo, which remains inserted till the irritation ceases.' (65)

Also connected with initiation was the practice of scarification. Mathews does not refer to it but several early writers, including Miller (64), Breton (65) and Dawson (66) noted the practice. Scarification was the ritual scarring of the back, shoulders, stomach, and occasionally the legs, of the men. Sometimes, the women were scarred also (67). The skin was raised in welts by cutting with a sharp instrument and then filling the cuts with clay, preventing them from healing for a long period. Miller says that the operation was performed in conjunction with the initiation ceremony, but Dawson, describing the

(63) A. Dawson 22,618: p519-520.
(64) R. Miller 22,416: p373.
(65) T. A. Breton 22,608: p214.
(66) A. Dawson 22,618: p479.
(67) Ibid.
process in detail, states that it took place beforehand.

'The process commences by making deep incisions on
the chest, back, shoulders, or limbs, (never on
the face), with sharp edges of shells, according
to the taste of the operator. The wounds are
afterwards kept in a state of irritation for a
long period, and when the wound first, or fungus,
is raised sufficiently above the surrounding
surfaces, the wounds are allowed to heal, leaving
raised lines of various lengths and forms. The
operation is performed at various ages, from one
or two years, to ten or twelve; and as the wounds
are sometimes kept open for a year or more, the
pain and inconvenience must be very great.' (69)

It is difficult to find a consistent interpretation
of the custom. Scott says that at Port Stephens it was
purely for decorative purposes; (69) as it was at Port
Jackson. (70) Petrie, describing the custom at Moreton
Bay, where it was performed

'in dull damp weather, if possible, the idea being
that it would not hurt so much then;' says that the patterns were tribal markings. (71) In
central Australia, the gashes denoted the class of the
bearer, or his courage and prowess as a warrior. (72)
Kethews, referring to the North Coast generally, says the
process of scarification was gradual, and closely related
to the removal in stages of food taboo. (73)

(69) R. Dawes op.cit: p341.
(69) W. Scott THE FIRST STEPHENS ISLANDS: p97.
(70) G. Barrington Works: P79.
(71) C.G. Petrie ANGKA P80.
(72) A.M. Kethews SCARIFICATION, TOTEMS, etc.
(73) R.H. Kethews "Food Regulations, Totems", etc.
There is no record of the women having undergone an initiation ceremony as did the men. They did experience an interesting operation, the removal of one or two joints from the little finger of either hand, but there is no indication that it was related to eligibility for marriage or any other form of initiation or graduation to womanhood.

Most of the early observers thought that the finger was removed in order to improve the woman's fishing efficiency in one of several ways. Thus in the Port Stephens district,

'It was the practice in certain cases, where a girl was intended to be a specially good fisher-woman, when grown up, to sever the little finger of the left hand at the second joint, and to throw the severed part into the water; the idea being that the fish would eat it, and ever after be attracted to the line held by the owner of the hand from which it came.' (74)

Further north

'This operation was said to be performed so as to enable the woman to throw out their fishing lines better.' (75)

In the Port Jackson area the same motive apparently prevailed:

'This operation is performed when they are very young; it is done under an idea that these joints of the little finger are in the way when they wind their fishing lines over the hand.' (76)
According to Dawson the finger was removed to signify that the girl's career was to be that of a fisherman.

'So important an office do they consider this near the coast, that the mother instructs one of her female children to do as soon as born, amputating the little finger of the right hand, as a token of such appointment.' (77)

Fawcett describes how the operation was performed.

'If a girl was intended to be a fisher, whilst a baby she had the little finger of her left hand amputated by a very simple expedient. A strong spider's web was wrapped tightly round the last joint, stopping all circulation of the blood, and in a short time, by constantly drawing the cord tighter the top of the finger was removed. The custom was supposed to make them good fishers.' (78)

The same method was used in the Hanning (79) and Moreton Bay (80) districts.

Most of these descriptions have concurred in that the operation was performed in early childhood. The practice may have been dying out when Fitzpatrick was writing, as none of the young girls were marked. Nevertheless, he says that on the Hanning

'Many gins explained that it was a custom adopted to show that they were "game".' (81)

(77) R. Dawson op. cit. p. 51.
(80) C.T. Patie op. cit. p. 97.
(81) P.A. Fitzpatrick op. cit. p. 47.
This suggests that in some areas the custom may have been akin to initiation in that it was a test that had to be passed before one could enjoy the full status of a woman. Collins's statement that those who had not undergone the ceremony appeared to be held in contempt (32) substantiates this.

Even where the removal of women's little fingers did have overtones of initiation, it was not regarded as being of the same importance as the men's ceremony. Also, it had a social rather than a religious significance; women were considered to be inferior, and so there was no revelation of sacred objects or tribal myths. The practice appears to have been restricted to the coastal regions.

Earlier it was mentioned that during the initiation ceremony the novitiates were presented with a piece of quartz crystal, which was not to be shown to any woman or uninitiated person. The Koradjiis or medicine men carried quartz crystals which had special powers.

'The medicine men possessed and carried about with them certain magical objects among which none were more revered than the quartz crystals; these were held to possess the most marvellous powers. These amulets were carried about in a skin pouch...' (33)

Little was known as to what these powers were.

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(32) D. Collins "Blacks" p302.
Kowitt's only comment is,

'An extraordinary mystery attaches to the large quartz crystal in these tribes.' (24)

The aborigines were very reticent about the sacred stones.

'They would never tell us what was in these bags; or indeed discuss them at all—my curiosity however was gratified in an unexpected way. We children were out for a walk in charge of our faithful black servant said Fanny... As boys will do—I climbed a mangrove tree and found in a hollow one of these little mystery bags—When Fanny saw it she became greatly agitated and told me to put it back at once—but before doing so I had a look inside and found it contained only a piece of quartz or rock crystal.' (25)

Illness and death were believed by the natives to result from the sorcery of another tribe, and this sorcery was effected largely through the medium of these quartz crystals possessed by the medicine men. Within their own tribe, however, the medicine men often used the crystals to cure illness, and always their curative measures were of a magico-religious nature.

'The Koradjys or Kradjys (or native doctors) in cases of sickness often imposed on the tribe by pretending to extract pieces of wood or stone from the seat of pain with their mouths.' (26)

MacDonald refers to another curative measure which seems even less practical.

'Then anyone is sick, the Kradjis come round him and sing.' (27)

(26) J. W. Russell Korrina p130.
(27) A. MacDonald Keddie p296.
The whites introduced many diseases and ailments to which the aborigines had no immunity and from which they therefore suffered frequently. This meant that the Europeans had ample opportunities to observe native attempts at medication.

Miller enumerates some of the ills which plagued the aborigines as a result of contact with the white man.

'diseases (particularly smallpox) introduced by the Whites, exposure to rain (which the aborigines avoided in great measure before we interfered with their modes of life), bronchitis, and rheumatic fever.' (89)

He then lists the most common forms of medication which was applied by the aborigines. Mostly these were more practical than those employed by the medicine men.

'For rheumatism the skin was scarified; the gums bled for toothache, and hot stones applied to relieve various sorts of pains. Wounds were plastered with wet clay, and bleeding staunched by the application of a sort of spongy bark.' (89)

Dawson describes another treatment of rheumatism and injuries.

'They have a great idea of bandages, or rather ligatures, for if they sustain any injury of the limbs, or feel any pain from rheumatism, from which they frequently suffer, they tie a string very tight about the part affected, which they say relieves the pain.' (90)

Heated kangaroo dung was sometimes applied to open wounds. (91)

(89) ibid: p353.
(90) R. Dawson loc. cit: p203.
(91) A. McDonald loc. cit: p256.
In the Port Stephens area a complex procedure was occasionally adopted, involving magic. Scott describes it.

'It was the practice sometimes when a man was suffering from some internal pain to get his wife to "persify" for him, which was done in the following way - the patient sat or reclined on the ground, a canoe-shaped vessel of timber (92) half about a couple of feet long half filled with water was placed near him; a cord of person's hair was passed round his body a couple of times over the seat of the pain; the crossed ends were held by the woman and passed rapidly between her closed lips - as she leant over the water - until the blood began to flow and drop into it until it became the colour of blood itself - the belief being that the cause of the pain would leave the body through the cord and finally through the blood into the water - I don't know if anything special was done with the blood-stained water... but no doubt faith might help towards a cure very materially.' (93)

Breton describes a similar practice at Port Macquarie. There the liquid was drunk by the husband. (94)

With so little information it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of aboriginal medication. Some curative measures probably were successful, but on the many occasions when magic was employed there was doubtless little connection between the remedy and the recovery. Furthermore the paucity of information precludes any knowledge either of the plants used by the aborigines for medicinal purposes or of the degree to which they utilized what was available within the environment.

(93) W. Scott Æsìt: p37.
(94) W.H. Breton Æsìt: p237.