

AFFRAY WITH NEWCASTLE NATIVES IN 1796.

It is truly deplorable that the first encounter with the natives of Newcastle should have been stained with blood. The traditions of the natives abound with touching relations of the injustice they sustained from the whites from the first settling in the country. The native attacks upon the whites have rarely, if ever, been made without ample provocation.

As a rule the natives are cruel and revengeful foes, but they rarely become adversaries without adequate cause. Persecuted and belied by the whites, they have been represented as destitute of virtues, worthless, and ferocious when, in reality, they frequently exhibit great generosity, elevation of spirit, and energy of address, which are not surpassed among the inhabitants of civilised countries. The main cause of the quarrel between the Newcastle blacks and the fishermen was the latter having molested some members of the natives' family. The principal particulars we have of this melancholy conflict are those handed down to us by the Secretary of the colony, Captain Collins, who in his diary relates that "these people (meaning the fishermen) having conducted themselves improperly on shore, two of them were severely wounded by the natives, one of whom died soon after he reached the (Sydney) hospital." The diary is silent as to what cruelties were meted out to the natives, or whether numbers were wounded or killed. It is just possible the fishermen perpetrated wanton cruelties on the blacks, for many miseries have been sustained by the blacks at their first meeting with the whites; and so unrelenting has been their persecution that it is a pity our first annals should have been soiled with that sanguinary temper which has disgraced colonisation in countries newly discovered. In this sad transaction history repeats itself, for the first conflict between the whites and blacks at Port Jackson took place on May 30, 1788, when two convicts, while cutting rushes down the harbour, were killed in retaliation for the ill-treatment of some native women in a bay, which was henceforward called Rushcutter's Bay.

On this occasion Governor Phillip with 12 armed men went to Coogee Bay, and there saw 212 natives. Phillip writes: "The natives not being accustomed to treachery, the moment the friendship I offered was accepted on their side they joined us, most of them laying down their spears and stone hatchets with the greatest con-

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edness; and afterwards brought down some of their women to receive the little articles we had to give them. We parted on friendly terms, and I was now more than ever convinced of the necessity of placing a confidence in these people as the only means of avoiding a dispute." Phillip knew how to treat the natives, and demonstrated the fact that a friendly intercourse with them was not impossible. But these unoffending creatures, unable to draw distinctions, invariably exercised that cruelty and resentment which a savage must naturally feel for injuries received. On either side provocations were rarely found wanting, and one shudders at the recital of deeds of inhumanity practised on the natives of the northern district during its early settlement. The Newcastle natives never forget the lesson the fishermen taught them; therefore it can hardly be a matter of surprise that the injuries inflicted upon them should not be revenged upon the whites whenever an occasion presented itself; for it has been since the first collision a constant practice to fire upon the natives whenever they approached, and to deprive them of their women whenever the opportunity offered.