

QUARTER MASTER HACKING PUN-
ISHES THE NEWCASTLE
BLACKS IN 1799.

When Governor Hunter granted permission to Messrs. Underwood and Lord to send their boats to the Coal River for coals they were strictly enjoined to instruct the boatmen to be very particular in their conduct towards the natives. They were to endeavour by every possible means to conciliate them and not to take away any of their canoes, spears, or weapons. All went well for a long period of time, until some of the visitors offended the natives, who threatened to spear them in retaliation. It was apparently the old story—some of the men had seized upon some of the young native women, and had wounded some of the complaining fathers or husbands. The natives when not stirred up to revenge from the frequent abuses they received from the settlers in general invariably manifested themselves to be a sociable people, and their economy and government in many respects was commendable. However, there were among the boatmen some who conceived that the natives were so degraded as to be insensible of the benefits of life, therefore treated them like barbarians, as if they were incapable of comprehending the indignities to which their women were subjected. Coercive measures were taken by the natives, and at last the boatmen took fright and left their boats in the hands of those they had offended. Failing to obtain possession of their craft, the boatmen proceeded to undertake a journey overland to Sydney. Prior to their reaching Port Jackson some of the natives had sent word to headquarters that the men had deserted the boats at the river through the troublesome behaviour of the river natives. The Colonial Secretary, Captain Collins, in his diary, under date April, 1799, gives the following interesting account of the transaction:—"It having been reported for several days that the crews of two boats which had been permitted to go to the Hunter River had been cut off by the natives, the

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Governor ordered his whaleboat to be well armed and he proceeded thither in quest of the boats and their crews, sending in her Henry Hacking, a person in whom he could depend. This man at his return informed the Governor that on his arrival an attempt had been made to burn the smaller boat, which had three men in her, who were each provided with a musket. The boat was there, but the men were not to be found. Going in search of them he found a large body of natives, all armed. On desiring them to inform him what had become of the white men, they told him they were gone to Sydney. This, however, did not satisfy him, as he found they had taken away the sails of the boat, the men's blankets, and everything they had with them. He threatened to kill them if they did not instantly inform him, and presented his musket, at which they laughed, and said that if he did not go away and leave them a small boat which he had with him, and the whale boat, they would destroy every white man there, and poised their spears in a threatening manner. He again levelled his gun at them, and snapped it without priming, in the hope of alarming them; but they were not so easily frightened, and became more noisy and violent. Finding that an attack was almost certain, he charged his gun with buck shot and ordered them to leave the place, but their clamour increasing, he fired and four of them fell, one of whom got up again and ran off, the other three remaining upon the ground, probably mortally wounded. The whole body disappeared, and no more was seen of them, leaving Hacking to fill his boat and effect his retreat unmolested." This is the white man's account, but the natives' version is missing, and can only be surmised. It is apparent that Quarter Master Hacking disbelieved the natives' truthful statement that the boatmen had gone to Sydney, and, without waiting for a spear to be thrown, he adopted the usual mode of revenge by Christian strangers, by pouring a broadside into the ranks of the natives. Judging from the many cases of wholesale slaughter of the natives for the killing of a white man

by an enraged native, the rule was "shoot the black devils whenever you have the opportunity, and make no attempt to ascertain the real offender."

Whenever the military went out the punishment was always effective, but the savage oratory of firearms never produced peaceful results. From the foundation of the colony this theory of the subjection of the natives to British rule was maintained, but instances of injustice or wanton cruelty to the natives remained unchastised.