TO THE EDITOR OF THE HERALD.

Sir,—The minute of the Colonial Secretary, published in your issue of the 3rd instant, in reference to the “protection of aborigines,” will no doubt have been read by all who have at any time interested themselves in the matter with feelings of thankfulness that at last the cruelty and neglect of the present method of treatment of the aborigines are commencing to be recognised. Much comment has been made in your columns upon the aborigines of La Perouse, undoubtedly because of their proximity to Sydney. There are, however, in the colony several small communities of aborigines, who, unassisted, have made much greater strides in acquiring habits of industry and self-reliance than the Botany community would appear to have done. Amongst these may be fairly classed the remnant of the Port Stephens tribe, numbering some 37 souls in all, who have been for the past four or five years encamped on the banks of the Barrington River, some five miles from here. The community contains some ten or a dozen men attached to the camp, two, however, of whom are upwards of 60 years of age, and have been for the past month, by the direction of the Protector of Aborigines, supplied with a weekly ration of flour, tea, and sugar.

Of the remaining men, some three or four are engaged regularly by the adjoining farmers as farm labourers, usually upon a six or twelve months engagement, at an average rate of £25 per annum.

The remainder of the men earn a subsistence by fencing and other bush work, for which however, they invariably receive considerably less than white men would require for the same work. During the past two years almost all the fencing upon the Church and School Estate farm leases in this neighbourhood—some six or eight miles at least—has been erected by these men, and the workmanship is admitted to be first-class.

The fencing is one only of the multifarious items of general bush work performed by these aboriginals, but of itself is sufficient to redeem them from the charge of utter laziness so frequently recklessly made against the whole race.

The reserve upon which they are at present encamped, is a portion of church and school land 50 acres in
The reserve upon which they are at present encamped, consists of a portion of church and school land, 50 acres in extent, temporarily reserved from lease, through the exertions of Mr. Sharpe (formerly police magistrate here), and other gentlemen.

This reserve, however, contains barely two acres of land available for agriculture, the remainder being pastoral land of very poor quality. These two acres have this season been ploughed, and garden implements supplied, at the cost of the Protector of Aborigines, and this, so far, with the ration to the two old men, comprises all the Government assistance the community has received.

The land ploughed is now under cultivation to the utmost of its capacity; but the area (two acres) is utterly inadequate for the support of the camp, and will not allow even a decent garden patch to each family.

A total reserve of at least 40 acres of alluvial agricultural land is required to afford each family a reasonable area—say five or six acres—on which to earn a subsistence by agriculture. The men themselves disclaim any wish to receive rations from the Government if a sufficient area of suitable land, with a team and the necessary implements, can be provided them. Seeing that they are so far practically acquainted with agricultural work, the experiment of assisting them in this direction would be well worth trying, and I trust that you will lend your advocacy towards obtaining from the Government for these remnants of a fast-disappearing race the trifling outlay necessary to provide these requirements.

So far back as September last a promise was made by the Hon. George Thornton, Protector of Aborigines, that the question of supplying them with a team, plough, &c., would receive consideration when funds were available; but so far these articles have not been provided, while the question of increasing their present very limited area is, I understand, still awaiting a report from the Department of Lands.

There are several reasons why these aborigines should not be removed from their present location to any newly-proclaimed reserve on Crown lands in this neighbourhood, one being that, excepting the Church and School Estate, no Crown land in the vicinity contains any alluvial lands suitable for cultivation. Another reason is that some two or three of the younger children attend the Barrington Public school, distant about a quarter of a mile, which attendance
school, distant about a quarter of a mile, which attendance must cease in event of such removal. Further, the present camp is at least five miles from the nearest public-house, and, while not in any direct line of traffic, is still within an easy distance by a fair road of the local market, i.e., Copeland.

What is immediately required in this case is the resumption of some of the adjoining church and school farm lots, leased some years since, and several of which lots are even yet comparatively unimproved, while such resumption in September last would probably have cost very little. Since September (by reason of improvements) the cost of resumption would, in the cases of some of the most desirable of these lots, be considerably increased, and further delay can only enhance the cost. The Hon. Alexander Stuart, in the minute published in your issue of the 3rd instant, acknowledges the duty of the State, amongst other items, "to provide grants of lands and implements of industrial work" to the aborigines, and I venture to hope that on publicity being given to the facts of this case, assistance of exactly this nature may be extended to the camp at Barrington.