Peeps into the Past

ABORIGINES.

PART II.

(Written for the "Wingham Chronicle.")

(By J. E. W.)

The Kabbok Tribe of aborigines which inhabited this district, were linguistically allied to and apparently a branch of that strong tribe that ranged over the Manning and Wallamba water shoals.

The boundaries of their "towers"—tribal territory—seems to have been well defined geographically, by adopting the watersheds of these two rivers. To the west and throughout the Hunter Valley roamed the powerful Kamilaroi Tribe and its branches, and on the north was a distinct New England tribe. The Williams River blacks were apparently a branch of the Kamilaroi, but the Port Stephens Tribe seems to have been distinct from either by their place names.

Their vocabulary was limited, and their sense of magnitude found expression in repetition. Thus the great precipice on Carries Peak became "Reegaal Reegaal." The treeless uplands of Eckford Downs was "Bean Bean." And the beautiful glades of Gunbar became "Koomi Koomi." (hunting spears). Here periodically the natives of many tribes gathered to collect the quartz crystal prisms they so highly prized.

Their food supply consisted of everything that could run, fly, crawl, or swim. Almost anywhere one may find trees up which they climbed, by cutting steps with tomahawks, in search of possums. Their fish were largely obtained by throwing into the still pools the pounding up smart weed; this blinded the fish and brought them to the surface, where they became an easy prey. The bark of the cobuk, a species of acacia, was used in the same way to poison the fish. Their vegetable food was restricted. The edible pith of the roots of the large flagged water reed was greatly eaten (Wampoon). The soft turnip like root of young kuri-jong (Binagal) and the very paintable yam like root of the "townake" vine were in demand also. This vine grows on the edges of scrubs and penetrates many feet downwards; so that the labor of digging with only yam sticks must have been enormous, as some of the holes are still extant.

Cannibalism was not customary, though cases are known. It occurred on the Moneral, one of the A. A. Coy's, shepherds named Tongue being the victim. At Cangat there dwelt a fierce and turbulent warrior named Mercy, feared by all the neighboring blacks. By chance an opportunity occurred; he was speared and buried only to be disinterred, his stomach cut open, and the fat extracted and eaten. The ballet was that whoever partook of it would gain the strength and courage of the deceased.

With the aborigines every prominent spot was given a name, descriptive of some physical feature real or fanciful: the habitat of some bird, animal or tree; or commemorative of some past deed. Thus Boolan Boolan was the scene of an old time tribal battle; Giro the habitat of the satin bird; and Tigre the place of the ironbark.

Many of the following names and meanings have been supplied by Jack Cook, upon whom the ceremony of the Boombit was performed, many others, unfortunately, are forgotten; Bookan, Gloucester Backets; Big Rock, Boolan Boolan; Waudivory, Big Battle; Bocoy Willah; Boney dead; Willah, small round stones in conglomerate (buried stone); Mookanbhah (now Folkland). Mookan—barkoot, bakh—place; Berrico, a rocky pool; In creek of same name. Terumbi, Gloucester River. Naby Naby, Large island in Barrington River. Cautielah—half moon. Kirripit (now Rawdon Vule)—small brown kangaroo rat. Kirripilah—The forks—junction of the Rawdon and Arundel Rivers with the Barrington. Cobikha—a variety of Acacia used for poisoning fish. Baroneal—round moon. A "bra" shaped valley, parish of Knowles and Boranee, Kiadam—buck "possum. A lofty conical mountain, parish of Waweon. Moppy—soft grass; a locality and a left branch of the Barrington River. Colwan—a species of eagle; locality and left branch of the Barrington, parish Wombah, Wattonba—(watered, smooth sandstone rocks; bakh, place) parish Boranee, Urrimakkha—near clouds; lofty mountain north of Cobakh Station; also lofty range to the head of Newcoundle River. Koomb Kooni—hunting spears; Gunmb Plain, parish Mill. Pingnabarneah—(correctly Pingootnabarney)—