

The Kattang (Kutthung) or Worimi: An Aboriginal Tribe

(By W. J. ENRIGHT.)

In the year 1896 I commenced visits to the western end of Port Stephens, where there was an aboriginal reserve occupied by several full bloods and many half castes. The headman, named "Tony," then about seventy years of age, was not only an initiate but was the ruling spirit of the "Keepara." They gave apparently to themselves a name which had not to that time appeared in print, and which I spelt "Kutthung," but Professor Radcliffe-Browne, and Rev. A. P. Elkin have given what now proves to be not the name of the tribe, but of the language, the title "Kattang," and by that name I shall in future refer to those who spoke that tongue.

In the course of my enquiries I was given, what I believed through my ignorance of their social organizations, the names of various neighbouring tribes. Further investigations have clearly shown that the Gummipingal, Yeerung-gal, and Birroong-gal were but hordes of the Kattang-speaking tribe called the Worimi. The suffix "gal" or "kal" means a division, clan or horde.

Thelkeld, whose work on the Awabakal of Lake Macquarie is the finest in existence concerning the language of any New South Wales Aborigines, was apparently unaware that those people were only part of a tribe. A. W. Howitt¹ refers to a tribe he calls the Geawegal, as inhabiting part of the valley of the Hunter River extending to each lateral watershed and from twenty to thirty miles along the valley on each side of Glendon. On one of the maps illustrating his work he shows their territory as lying along the north bank of the Hunter from about Tomago to Glendon.

The suffix "gal," however, shows conclusively that the Geawegal was only a horde, and Kattang was the language, at any rate as far west as Maitland and Paterson. The Geawegal, he states, spoke the language of and intermarried with those of Maitland and also of Paterson. The Gringai, according to the same author, intermarried with the Paterson River natives and those of Gloucester.

Howitt's remarks and his map are rather confusing, for the latter shows the Geawegal occupying the land along both sides of the lower Paterson and the country about Maitland. I am now forced to the conclusion that the Geawegal was merely a horde, and a part of the Worimi tribe.

Investigations made recently in company with Dr. Elkin at Port Stephens lead me to believe that the Maiangal lived along the sea-shore south of Port Stephens, and westward as far as Telegraphy Creek; that the Garuagal occupied country adjoining Telegraphy Creek and along the lower Hunter, and their territory joined that of the Buraigal, who lived on right bank of Karuah up to Stroud. The northern side of Port Stephens and left bank of Karuah was occupied by the Gamipingal. All four were hordes of the Worimi. In "Notes on Aboriginal Tribes on North Coast of New South Wales,"² I stated that "Kutthung" was spoken from a little south of the Macleay River to the Hunter River District. Dr. Fraser in his map published in 1892 gives the northern boundary as a line south of the Macleay, but calls the tribe "Kurrigai."

Professor Radcliffe-Browne informed me that he found Birripai spoken on

¹ Native Tribes of South East Australia, p. 85.

² Proceedings Past Pacific Congress (Australian), Vol. i, p. 267.

the Hastings River. I have since visited that district, and find that four Birripai speakers survived, and their language was originally spoken as far as the Manning River. The former river was first settled, and on that account the extinction of the natives began earlier than on the rough and still sparsely settled country lying between Port Stephens and the Wollombi River. As the Birripai decreased in numbers tribal boundaries ceased to be maintained, and the Worimi established their camps and intermixed with the few remaining Birripai. Prior to settlement, however, the Manning was the boundary.³

William Scott speaks of the Gringai tribe, a sub-branch of a numerous native people that once inhabited the lower portions of the Hunter and Karuah River Valleys. Scott is the only one who applies that name to the aborigines of Port Stephens or its neighbourhood, and, as Howitt applies the name to the aborigines of the district around Dungog on the authority of J. W. Boydell of Camyr Allyn, who was noted for his keen and benevolent interest in the natives, I prefer to accept his statement. The aborigines whom I referred to as the "Kutthung" in my earlier papers I now know to be the "Buraigal," a horde of the Kattang-speaking people whose tribal name was "Worimi." The territory of the latter certainly extended no further north than the Manning, which was bounded on the east by the Pacific Ocean, on the west as far as the Glendon Brook Valley.

My old friend the late John Hopson stated that he had been informed by the late J. W. Boydell that in summer time the Paterson River blacks ascended the Barrington Tops *via* the Allyn River Valley, and on a visit in December, 1915, we found a stone axe on the tableland. That country and the Upper Manning was, in all probability, occupied by those of the Kattang tongue.

Threlkeld, according to Sir Edward Parry, the Superintendent of A.A. Company, relates that on 11th July,

1833, Threlkeld visited Tabler and spoke to fifty blacks who were assembled, in their own language, endeavouring to lead their minds to a knowledge of a few of the leading points of religion. They were attentive and seemed much interested. That was apparently Threlkeld's first visit to Port Stephens, and the incident, as well as a perusal of Threlkeld's grammar and vocabulary of the Awabakal, who inherited the country around Lake Macquarie, suggests that the Awabakal spoke Kattang. No living natives can now tell us how far south the speech of the Awabakal was spoken, and we will never now learn it with certainty. Turuwul, however, was the language of the Port Jackson natives, and the Hawkesbury River probably was the boundary between the two people.

In the near future I hope to be able to discuss whether what we call languages of New South Wales coastal tribes were merely dialects. I have found evidence of friendly relations between Port Stephens and Newcastle people in the shape of Merewether chert at Morna Point on the south of Port Stephens and at "The Gibbers," a headland on the coast opposite Broughton Island. This material was used for knives and scrapers, a purpose for which it was eminently suitable.

This siliceous material from Merewether has been observed as far south as Tuggerah Lakes Entrance.

For the four hordes above mentioned there were only two headmen. One controlled the two coastal groups, and the other the two inland groups.

In a previous paper I mentioned that the class division system did not extend below the Manning River. The Worimi had, within the hordes, divisions each with a totem peculiar to itself. Marriage between people of the same totem was forbidden, and the prohibition also extended to relatives who were second cousins, or more nearly related. Persons between whom marriage was forbidden were not allowed to speak to one another, except under special circumstances. A brother, for instance, could ask a sister to bring him water if ill.

³ The Port Stephens Blacks, p. 1.

Each sex had its totem. The men's was the kalan-gulang (the bat) and the women's, the dilmun (woodpecker). If a man killed a dilmun the women would attack him with their yam-sticks, and an injury inflicted on a bat by a woman would lead to punishment being inflicted by the men.

The Worimi had their initiation ceremonies, which I have previously described.⁴

Since then I have learnt that after a man is initiated he goes through no further ceremony of initiation, but when he attends future "Keeparas" he assists in initiating others. If he wishes to become a "Karadji" he could attend a spot called "Nambi" with a "Karadji," and there be dipped in water. After that he receives instruction from his guardian.

Mr. W. W. Thorpe relates that stone circles had been seen by Mr. Threlkeld in the summits of the mountains at Lake Macquarie, and quotes a statement by Miles: "Mr. Alfred Denison informed me that these circles are in the Paterson District, confirmed also by Mr. Commissioner Fry, who has seen them, and considers them to be aerolites, no similar stone being known in the district. The circles are not above twenty feet in diameter; the stones are seldom more than a foot above the ground; and in the centre is an upright stone about three feet high. The natives are very tenacious of any of these stones being moved, especially the centre one. The only reply the blacks made to any inquiry on this subject, and on which they are loth to speak is, 'Don't know, blackfellow make it so long time ago.'" I may interpolate here "that Mr. Alfred Denison was a well-known magistrate in New South Wales during the 'forties."

I am familiar with the Paterson District and so far, with the exception

of one at Red Hill on Mr. J. Vögele's property, I have not been able to learn of any stone circle. The circle mentioned was on a neck of columnar basalt, and some of the columns were left standing around the rim of the neck. A stone axe and ashes were found in the centre of circle, and that, coupled with its position in a high hill once covered with dense brush, leads me to believe that it was the sacred ring of the "Keepara."

Mr. G. B. White, L.S., in a paper read before the Maitland Scientific Society many years ago, stated that whilst surveying for the Crown in the Nandewar Ranges (north-west New South Wales) he saw stone circles which had been made by aborigines, and was informed that when a man wished to become a "Karadji" he went there at night and communed with the spirits.

I have heard of a stone circle on Mr. Sommerville's run west of Mt. George (N.S.W.) but I think it was a "Keepara" ring and was of stone instead of (as usual) earth, because of the stony nature of the site. The man who became a "Karadji" acquired a personal totem whose spirit within him, according to Dr. Elkin's informant, assisted him in his work.

Recently I have learnt that when the candidate for initiation was taken to each of the carved trees around the scared ring he was told a story about the carvings thereon. The aborigines have a legend that it was the cat-fish who founded the "Keepara" ceremony, and pointed out as proof that the cat-fish built a ring of stones as a nest, and the male guarded it. If we knew the full story we might find that the cat-fish embodies one of their ancestral heroes.

Rain-making ceremonies were practised, but were of a simple nature, and were always performed on the coast by inland natives.

⁴Initiation Ceremonies of Aborigines of Port Stephens. Proceedings Royal Society of N.S.W., Vol. XXXIII, p. 115. Australian A.A.S., Vol. 17, p. 485.