March 5th. 1945.

SANDGATE HOUSE
AYR

Dear Mr. Justice Jacquot

Your letter of 28th. Augt. 1944
has been forwarded to me here.
My mother died many years ago.
I have been looking through her papers
& have found a copy of her "recollections
of some Australian Blacks" which I now
send to you. I am sorry there is not
a copy of her other recollections left.
It is often wished that there had been
more copies printed as there would find
a large demand for them when

Recollections of some . . Australian . Blacks. . .

RECOLLECTIONS OF SOME AUSTRALIAN BLACKS.

Bathurst District, 1835-40. Port Macquarie, 1844. Hunter's River, 1850.

WRITTEN IN 1890.

I was talking lately to some friends about the native Blacks of Australia, and we became so much interested in the subject that I determined to write down some of my early recollections of our old friends of the Capita Tribe, which is now, I fancy, quite extinct, as in 1835 to '40, when we saw a good deal of them, there were only seven left. These were old Jacky and his Gin Mary, their two sons, Jimmie and Charlie, and their wives, Mary and Nannie. Nannie was Charlie's Gin, and they had one little girl, Maria, really a pretty, intelligent child, with whom we often played. She taught us to run along a narrow plank and to cross the creek on it, even when the water was in full flood, but we never could equal her nimbleness and fleetness of foot.

Once when Marie was about seven years old, her mother left her with us for a few days. The first day she was very happy and delighted with all the attention we paid her; the night was not so successful, as she had to sleep alone in an empty room. The next day she was very restless, and towards night began to cry, always declaring her foot was sore, but as she described it as "stockyard in mundowie" we could not make out what was wrong. So early the next morning we sent off for her mother, who was only about three miles away, and really their meeting was quite affecting, Nannie hugging her and saying, with a smile and a frown "Poolish piccaninnie you," and poor little Maria sobbing with joy. Then the foot was examined again, and we found a small splinter in it. The natives

call any piece of split wood "stockyard" from the stockyards being made always of splint wood, so "stockyard in mundowie" was found to mean that she had a splinter of wood in her foot.

The Blacks, as we called them, were an unsettled wandering race, but the small tribe I am writing about kept always together, some times they were accompanied by a neighbouring tribe and occasionally by strangers, the latter generally from the Coal river, or Hunter's river, as we now call it. Their language is difficult to learn. I never knew any one who could speak it perfectly, but we could make ourselves understood in broken English, which they spoke fluently. They called anything that pleased them "budgerry," and anything large or great "cabawn, thus the lady of the house was "the cabawn missis," the Queen "cabawn missis belonging to her." We were very loyal and told them about Her Majesty, whose reign had then but recently begun. They liked to hear about her, but her chief greatness to them was that she possessed an unlimited supply of blankets, as each one of them who applied at the nearest Government store got one on the Queen's birthday, a very sensible and seasonable gift, as May there is the beginning of winter.

When they visited us they usually encamped about half-a-mile from the house on a grassy flat near the creek, and we took the earliest opportunity of paying them a visit. In fine weather their camps were composed of a half circle of green boughs interlaced so as to form a sheltering wall about three or four feet high. In wet or stormy weather they stripped off sheets of bark from the tall gum trees or stringy bark trees, and sticking two forked posts into the earth about eight feet apart, put a ridge pole across between them. Against this rested the bark slanting, and under this poor shelter they slept contentedly, always keeping up a good fire in front. The men stripped off the bark and formed the "Gunyah;" the women lit the fire and prepared the food, but when the opossum was sufficiently roasted the lord and master took possession of it, giving to his Gin only such pieces as he chose to tear off and throw to her. We used to watch all their proceedings with the liveliest interest, and they were always so good humoured and pleasant that we always rejoiced when we heard they were coming. I speak only of these old friends, for I know all the Australian blacks are not like them. Each family had a separate camp, and

each single man had a camp to himself. I believe this was the custom throughout the country.

Our first visit would, of course, be to Jacky and Mary, who, I must own, were hideous in the extreme and frightfully greedy, demanding tea, flour, sugar bag, 'bacca: but, poor creatures, very little satisfied them, and, like children, they were delighted with very trifling gifts. One evening when we went to see them we found that old Jacky was ill. He had a bad cold, and all were busy preparing a very primitive sort of hot bath for him. They dug a hole in the soft earth just large enough for one to lie in doubled up. This hole they lined with stones taken from the bed of the creek. They made a good fire in it, and when the wood was all consumed they swept it out with green boughs, then threw in a quantity of the young leaves of the gum tree (Eucalyptus) and poured water over them; of course, a great steam rose from the hot stones. I did not see the whole process, but we understood that Jacky was laid in the hole on the gum leaves and covered with an opossum skin rug, and that he was quite cured by the hot air and the gum leaves.

When first I remember these blacks Jimmie was a "poor man," that is to say he had no Gin, but one day we saw a rather doleful looking young woman seated in his camp, and were told he had just carried her off from a distant tribe. She was always called Mulwary Mary, and never seemed to be quite reconciled to her fate. She was a great contrast to Nannie, who really was comely and cheery.

Both Jimmie and Charlie were very fond of shooting, and brought us ducks and pigeons, and occasionally a turkey, but they never took to riding or breaking in horses, as so many of the natives did, neither do I remember ever seeing them at work about the place, though they were both strong, active men. There was a friend of theirs, Pretty Boy by name, who was great at burning off trees. I have seen him and his gin burning out stumps from a field for weeks at a time, and receiving rations regularly for their work and a small sum of money, which they spent sensibly enough in buying clothes at the nearest store. Of course they never required boots, and the blankets given annually on the Queen's birthday kept them comfortably supplied in addition to their own warm opossum skin rugs.

They made their rugs very large and of the best skins, but they

were too idle to make more than they absolutely required, and it was most difficult to get one from them, indeed one completed to their own taste is more curious than desirable, as it is impossible to divest it of a most offensive smell of combined grease and wood smoke. It was interesting to watch their mode of preparing these skins for a cloak. I do not think they ever caught the opossums for pleasure, and seldom prepared the skin for profit, but they showed wonderful activity and intelligence when they did set to work. The opossums generally were very plentiful, and, as they sleep during the day, it was not very difficult to secure them. A Blackfellow is tolerably sure of his prize before he takes the trouble to climb a tree for it. The good tomahauks supplied by the settlers no doubt helped them greatly both in chipping out notches in the tree to climb by and in cutting holes in the hollow branches where the opossums live. When they had secured as many as they desired they selected the best and carefully skinned them, pulled the fur off the others and used it for spinning. As for the remainder, they singed off the fur and roasted the opossum in its skin, which, I fancy, they considered far the best food, as the skinned ones were not often cooked, but were given to the dogs. Each skin as it was taken off was pegged out tightly and carefully, with the raw side out on a small sheet of bark, which was then set up before the fire but not too near, and rubbed from time to time with fine wood ashes, and the skin left on the bark till it was quite dry. When they had collected a good number of skins, they trimmed the edges, but did not make them all exactly the same size, then commenced what I think the most curious part of the work, marking the skins with patterns so as to make them quite soft and pliable. These marks are ornamental and of various designs, and form a pleasing whole. The skins, though by no means uniform in size, are made to fit together. As these patterns are formed by doubling the skins and scraping them with glass or flint, there can be no great variety. When sufficiently marked they are rubbed with grease and sewn together carefully by piercing holes with a finely-pointed bone and immediately passing a thread of lint, or of opossum wool. It was a painful process, painfully slow, till they learned to use the large needles and whity-brown thread given by the white men. It takes from thirty to forty skins to make a good sized cloak or rug.

The process of spinning the fur is much like the old distaff and spindle of other countries and it makes a good strong thread. With

this they net the belts or girdles worn by the men and sometimes make nets for the hair and small bags, but the bags or nets in which the women carry all their worldly goods are made of linen thread and are immensely strong and durable.

When the Blacks are about to move their camp the women collect all their possessions, stow away any small things in their bags, put on all the blankets and cloaks they possess under the left arm and fastened on the right shoulder with a wooden pin, being open down that side and leaving both arms free, the bag goes round the neck and under the left arm and helps to secure the cloak. Then they take a good staff in their hand and sometimes a lighted stick and set off for a walk of miles across the country without any track—they have a wonderful instinct which prevents them ever losing the way. The men stalk on quite independently, carrying only their spears and "nulla nullas" a sort of rude club, their "boomerangs" usually thrust through their belt, which is their only covering except the bunches of tags which descend from it—these tags are a few narrow strips of opossum skin.

They are not a selfish race or thieves, indeed their wants are so few they would only be encumbered with anything not absolutely necessary. The Blacks generally are very superstitious, having a confused notion of a supreme being and a future state, and talk of jumping up white men, that is rising after death to a higher state and they speak with horror of an evil spirit, who they think makes them ill or causes them misfortune, but they were not fond of talking on these subjects.

When staying near Bathhurst in 1840, we went to visit the graves of two Black fellows who had died some years before. One was Jacky Ranken, an old friend of ours. These graves were situated each on the brow of a separate hill. The nearest trees had been curved to mark the spot, but one had fallen, another had withered and was dying, while the tops on the graves raised originally some feet above the ground had fallen in so that they had a neglected appearance, and like the tribes to which the tenants of the graves belonged, all traces of them will soon have disappeared.

We were present only once at a great Corroboree or dance, probably about the year 1837. We supposed it to be the amicable con-

clusion of some religious ceremony or consultation, as there was a great gathering of strangers from distant tribes. I remember the Coal River (now Hunter) being mentioned, and also Goulburn and Maneroo. The blacks encamped for several days on a grassy plain not far from the house. We were for a time rather anxious as to the outcome of their doings. Then we got a message from them to say there was to be a grand Coroheree before they separated, and that all the white people were invited to see it.

The night was fine but very dark, fires from the different camps lighted up the scene. By these fires were seated the women, many of them holding in their laps or between their knees opossum skin cloaks gathered up into large pads, which they beat upon with their hands as an accompaniment to their singing, and which sounded much like muffled drums. The men at first were not visible, but presently they stole out of the darkness and ranged themselves in the light of the fires. They were all marked with pipe-clay in lines which followed their bones and made them look like skeletons, as in the gloom the outline of their dusky bodies was not descernable. The women then began to sing more loudly and to beat time on their cloaks. The men at first danced slowly and then more quickly, if dancing it can be called, spreading out their arms and legs which seemed to shake and quiver, while they uttered the most unmusical grunts, more like a horse sneezing than anything else. Finally they disappeared again into the darkness. Then others came stealing out, two or three at a time, with bodies bent and holding out one arm and hand to represent the head and neck of an Emu. In the other hand a bunch of twigs was held behind so as to represent the tail. The head and neck were moved about as if to see that all was safe before bending down to eat some grass. Then a few active men came bounding in who represented Kangaroos, their hands held up like paws and a long branch for a tail. They soon jumped off, and they or others appeared again at different points. It was a curious and amusing scene at the time but monotonous, and we did not remain very long. Next day the camp broke up, and the strangers made their way back to their own haunts or districts for homes they had none. I was a child of some eleven years at the time, but this wierd scene made a great impression on me. Their singing has neither spirit nor music and their voices no charm. We often tried to learn some of their little songs or chants, the only one I remember having a rather monotonous refrain of only

three words or syllables, on only four notes pronounced, min ya row, min ya row, min ya row, the last note loud and jerky.

Port Macquarie.

When we went to Lake Innes in 1841 there were still a good many members of the native tribes of the Port Macquarie and neighbouring districts, but we did not often see any of them, as they were not encouraged to come about the house. These blacks on the coast side of the range were, if possible, an uglier race than those of the Table land, not so well fed and pleasant looking, and of a dull black colour instead of a rich brown black. The men wore their hair differently, longer and drawn back and upwards over a tuft of coarse dried grass, and bound round with long stripes from the cabbage palm, with a tuft of hair and grass at the end about eight inches from the head. Murrigat and his Gin Ellen were the only two we knew. They used to bring fish to the house, and occasionally wild duck and wood pigeons. Sometimes we saw the women and children digging for cockles on the beach when the tide was low. They used pieces of wood with a flat end, and easily got as many as they cared to take away. Occasionally we came upon a party fishing at Cati Creek. One evening we walked to the lake intending to go to the boathouse on the bank. Quite near the pier we found a party of natives seated, to whom we spoke. Murrigat was busy at work on a canoe, with which he seemed highly delighted, while the others looked on with admiring eyes, at the same time enjoying a smoke. As we had never seen a canoe made we remained till this one was finished. It was made of a long oblong sheet of bark, the ends of which were drawn together by means of a piece of stick with a sharp point, which was thrust through the bark and then fastened secure by a strong vine. The vine had previously been put in hot ashes to make it tough. We saw the canoe launched, and then the well satisfied owners, after telling us not to touch that fellow, took their departure with many smiles and bows.

Another friend I must mention was Midgee Brown, a black boy from New England, who accompanied my uncle, Major Innes, in many long and weary journeys in the far bush. My uncle was much attached to him, and Midgee reciprocated for some years with devoted fidelity. At last my uncle took his friend with him to Sydney. He was so much noticed there by the gentlemen stopping at the Australian Club that I am sorry to say his head was quite turned, and he became rather pert and presuming. Many of those at the club were Squatters, at whose far-away stations my uncle and his attendant had rested when travelling together. There was also an English gentleman who had come out to the colony for pleasure, as sometimes happened even in those early days. He took a great fancy to this smart black boy, and proposed that he should go to England with him. Midgee was much flattered, and consented to go "just for a bit you know." But when my uncle left town he would not remain with his new patron. A few days after their return to Lake Innes, Midgee disappeared. He left no message for any one, and took nothing with him. It was many months before he was heard of, and then a stockman at an out station told how he had recognised him at a black's camp, where he was seated by a fire devoid of any clothing but the netted girdle always worn by the men. At first he pretended not to know the stockman, but afterwards let him understand that civilised life was not good enough for him, or, as he expressed it, "too much no good." Midgee never returned to the home station, and we never heard of him again; probably he died early.

St. Clair.

Some years afterwards, about 1850, I made the acquaintance of another tribe of Australian Blacks in a different part of the country Their habits were much the same as those of the Bathhurst district, only that for a part of every year the men worked regularly, and got rations and wages. This tribe consisted at the time I first saw them of a sturdy amusing fellow calling himself King Dicky, a deaf and

dumb man who was wonderfully useful and intelligent, an old woman known as Marmie, and her three sons, Jimmie, Davie, and George. George was a fine looking lad, but he took a severe cold, and died after a few weeks illness. Jimmie, the eldest, was a strong, active man, a good worker, and a good rider. He had a Gin and one Piccaninny, who, poor thing, was quite silly, but she used to spend hours gathering mulberry leaves for our silkworms one summer when we had a great many to feed. David lived in summer in a small hut in the garden. One day we were surprised to find it tenanted by a very comely young Gin, but she was shy and sulky, and did not take kindly to her new surroundings, David having carried her off with a high hand from a neighbouring tribe. She ran off more than once, and finally disappeared for good.

These people are always associated in my mind with an exciting cattle hunt that took place near the home station. We were all busy one afternoon in the empty hut that for the time was devoted to our silkworms, when we heard a great cracking of stockwhips and shouting. On looking towards the stockyards we saw a great dust and a herd of wild cattle coming in. There was a high strong fence between us and them, but we could not help a feeling of alarm when we saw a huge black bull rush out from among the rest and take a determined stand between us and the stockyard. In vain the stockmen cracked their whips and galloped round him, one man more daring than the others half dismounted and picked up some stones to throw at him, keeping one foot in tha stirrup and his hand on the saddle on to which he vaulted in a moment as the bull charged at him. We were really terrified, and when the boys who were with us climbed on to the fence in their excitement and anxiety to get a better view, we expected them to be attacked next. But now a nearer object had attracted the furious animal, close to the stockmen's huts, but on the opposite side of the road from the stockyard, the blacks had made a camp, and there on that eventful day lay poor old Marmie alone. Perhaps she had been asleep, or it may have been that her fear overcame her discretion, for all at once she rushed out of her camp towards the huts, of course the bull saw her, and after bellowing a moment and tearing up the earth, he rushed at her. We expected to see her trampled on or tossed into the air. Jimmie's wife and Piccaninny, who were in the garden and near us, howled piteously; their cry was taken up by her sons nearer the scene of action, and all shouted Marmie, Marmie!

But Marmie was equal to the occasion. She fell flat on the ground with her opossum cloak over her. The bull started back from it and its unpleasant odour, snorted, bellowed, and tore up the ground. Jimmie now made a rush for the stockman's hut to get a rifle. He got in safely, but could not get within range except from the roof. At last he made a bold rush out and got to the side of the chimney. The bull saw him, and turning from poor prostrate Marmie, who had never attempted to move, rushed madly at Jimmie and grazed his shoulder with his short strong horn. We all thought he would be killed, but in a moment heard the sharp report of the rifle. Then Jimmie was seen safely on the roof taking deliberate aim at the great creature, who apparently had been stupified by the smoke from the first shot. At the next he fell, and then there was a triumphant shout of Marmie, Marmie ! And up rose poor old Marmie, and staggered more dead than alive back to her camp. We all marched through the slip pannels to inspect the monster, the stockmen having meantime secured the rest of the herd. He really was an enormous creature, and looked terrible even when dead. A few hours after he was dragged to a hollow a short distance off, and left for the crows and native dogs to feast on. For a long time after this happened, we were afraid to go far from the fences when out walking, dreading to meet stray animals from some of the wild mountain herds.

One day we had a very pleasant expedition with King Dicky and several others in search of honey. They came up to the house to tell my aunt that they had found a beehive, and said if we would go with them and take a dish we might have a share of the honey, so off we set in great force, and, after we had walked about two miles, they pointed triumphantly to something we could not see, but believed it to be an English bee, for presently we came to a hollow tree where there were a good many flying about. Our black friends commenced at once to cut the tree down. By some accident it fell into the forked branch of another tree, but, nothing daunted, they proceeded at once to cut it off, though by this time the bees were flying about in angry swarms. In a wonderfully short time the trees were both down, and a square opening was then cut in the hollow trunk containing the honey. We were beckoned to advance and help ourselves. My aunt had a strong spoon and a tin dish, and helped herself liberally, and we all took great pieces of the sweet comb, the blacks looking on complacently. When they thought we had taken enough they stepped

forward, and, dipping some stringy bark into the honey, sucked it and dipped it in again. We then retired, and they ate as much as they could and filled their calabaubes and pannikins. We all returned home in great glee, delighted with our honey. Of course our friends were substantially rewarded for their liberality, but they asked for nothing nor attempted to make a bargain beforehand.

When staying at St Clair I became acquainted with the most intelligent native I ever met. He came from Port Stephens, and had been taken in hand early by a good and judicious missionary, who trained and educated him well, but made no attempt to show off his acquirements. On the contrary, he had been encouraged to work and allowed to follow the occupation he was most fitted for, and for which there was always a good opening. Dick was a most wonderful rider, and handled horses with such care and firmness that he found constant employment at good wages. When he came to St Clair he was at once engaged to remain and to break in some valuable young horses for the Indian market, and finally he sailed to Calcutta in charge of them. I was not at St Clair when he came back, but my aunt, who lived there, wrote to me that he was much improved by the voyage and all that he had seen, and that her boys were never tired of listening to his tales. It was rather a slack time at the station, and he was often with them and in full favour with every one. Then came a letter in which she expressed some annoyance at Dick's evident admiration for her pretty young nurse Eliza, but hoped that the horses just brought in would give him occupation for some time and keep him away from the house. Alas! poor Dick. He met his death from one of these untamed horses. He had just mounted for the first time a spirited young chestnut, and appeared, as usual, to have her in perfect control, when suddenly the brute plunged and buck-jumped madly. The saddle girths gave way, and the unfortunate rider was thrown violently on his head on the hard ground. For some time he lay stunned and insensible; when at last he showed signs of life it was only too evident that his spine was seriously injured. As soon as he was able to speak he asked for my aunt; she went to him at once. He whispered Eliza, so Eliza was sent for, and a happy smile crossed over his face when she came to his side. She was a good, kind girl, and took his cold hand in hers and held it tenderly while he murmured, "Don't forget poor Dick; I am glad to go—glad, glad, it is far better." A messenger had been

sent off in haste for the nearest doctor, some eighteen miles distant Before he could arrive poor Dick's spirit had fled, had gladly quitted his dusky body, and winged its way to realms of light, where all are the children of one merciful and loving Father.

In conclusion, it has often been said that the native Blacks of Australia are incapable of receiving any education. I must own that in all my experiences I have not met with or heard of any who had attained to a high degree of civilisation, though I have known some who could read and write, and several who conformed for a time to the habits of white people. It is against all experience that any living thing should at once, and completely, change its habits. Why, therefore, should these people be despised because they could not do so? They have died out so quickly on the approach of the white population that there has been no opportunity of gradually educating them, and developing the race. And now that they are gone, I do not lament over their extinction, but I wish to preserve all kindly remembrance of some of those individuals that I knew best, and who were most deserving of our friendship, and such words of praise as I can give them.