

APPENDIX G.

THE GEawe-GAL TRIBE.

I AM indebted to Mr. G. W. Rusden, Clerk to the Legislative Council of Victoria, for the following interesting information in respect to a tribe speaking the Geawe-gal dialect, on the Hunter River, New South Wales. This tribe is, I believe, now extinct. Mr. Rusden was identified with it, and spoke the language as a youth. Geawe-gal belongs to that class of tribes whose language is described by its negative—in this case, Geawe = No. Mr. Rusden says:—"The territory claimed by them may be defined as being part of the valley of the Hunter River extending to each lateral watershed, and from twenty-five to thirty miles along the valley on each side of Glendon. These aborigines spoke the language of, and intermarried with, those of Maitland. Less frequently with those of the Patterson River, and rarely with those of Muswell Brook. They were always in dread of war with the Kamilaroi, who intruded down the heads of the Hunter across from the Talbragar to the Munmurra waters, and even occasionally made raids as far as Jerry's Plains. A section of the Kamilaroi occupied the upper sources of the waters flowing into the Hunter River—that is, those which form the heads of the Goulburn River, for instance, the Munmurra Creek. The Dividing Range between the Munmurra and Talbragar sinks down so that a traveller would not think he was crossing the boundary between any waters, much less those which divide the Darling waters from those of the Hunter River.

This probably facilitated the spread of the powerful Kamilaroi.

"The myall wood weapons made at Liverpool Plains were exchanged with the coast natives for others (myrtle, &c.) which were made on the Hunter, and the Kamilaroi were spoken of as Myall blacks by the Geawe-gal, so that myall was almost synonymous with fierce.

"Although I do not recollect all their class divisions, they had distinctly the great divisions, Yippai and Kombo.* Apropos of the generic names, the Geawe-gal had a superstition that everyone had within himself an affinity to the *spirit* of some bird, beast, or reptile. Not that he sprung from the creature in any way, but that the spirit which was in him was akin to that of the creature. I have often spoken of the superstition, and found my *causeur* incredulous himself, but not doubting that it was an ancient tradition of his people.

"Marriage was ordinarily by gift of the woman and by consent of both fathers, in case the future husband was a boy or a youth, and would be arranged years before the time for marriage. Girls were thus affianced, in childhood also, to men much older than themselves. Wives were also exchanged (swapped) by their husbands. Some strong men, or popular men, had a number of wives. Elopement of unmarried girls was occasional, and in such cases the man would have to fight the intended husband or her male relatives. If he proved to be the victor, he kept the girl. She, in such cases, ran the risk of being beaten by her relatives, or even killed. In the case of female captives, they belonged to their captors, if of a class from which wives might be legally taken by them. If of a forbidden class, then, I

* [It always struck me as remarkable that even young children knew and could state off hand, with regard to every soul in the tribe, whether he or she was Yippai or Kombo.—G.W.R.]

think that the captor might make an exchange with some one of the proper class who had a woman at his disposal. The class of the female captive would be known if she belonged to any of the tribes with which the Geawe-gal were familiar. If the class could not be ascertained, then there would not be any objection to her captor retaining her.

"As a man had power of life and death over his wife, so, in the process of violent seizure, he assumed the same power. The only risk he ran was from the rage of her relatives or friends.

"In all cases it was absolutely necessary that women should be married according to tribal laws. The contrary would be inconceivable to the Geawe-gal. For instance, were the question put, 'Could not so and so marry?'—mentioning some man and woman of forbidden degree or class—the reply would invariably be, 'It cannot be.'

"I have occasionally heard of a saturnalia taking place among them, whereat wives were exchanged or lent to the young men, so that intercourse was almost promiscuous (subject to the class laws). When they admitted this to me, they did so as if also admitting that they were ashamed of it. This occurred not in open daylight, but at night. It might not happen for years.

"The best man in war would be recognized by them as principal adviser, and would have authority by consent of the elders. I have known the office to be hereditary, when the son proved himself a capable warrior. Without such proof, there was no possibility of his being accepted.

"A koradji (*i.e.*, wizard, medicine man) might be such a leader. In every case, however, the leading or chief man would be only *primus inter pares*, and be liable to be set aside by the council of old men if his actions were disapproved. At this council the younger men (that is

those having been initiated) might be present, but would not speak. Such councils were held at night. On ordinary occasions, for instance, in cases of disputes or of ordeal by battle, the old women had much to say.

“The principal social restraints in vogue were laws of satisfaction for injury done, by the offender submitting to an ordeal by which he exposed himself to danger. They did not, however, assume the form of the Saxon wehrgild, by which an injury could be compounded for; but they required that the offender should run the risk of a similar injury to the one he had done. According to the magnitude of his offence, he had to receive one or more spears from men who were relatives of the deceased person, or, when the injured person had recovered strength, he might himself discharge the spears at the offender.

“Obedience to such laws was never withheld, but would have been enforced, without doubt, if necessary, by the assembled tribe. Offences against individuals, or blabbing about the secret rites of the tribe, and all breaches of custom, were visited with some punishment. Such punishments, or such ordeals, were always *coram publico*, and the women were present. Not so the adjudication according to which the penalty was prescribed.

“They believed in the mysterious power of the koradji; but it is hard to say what special means of using it they ascribed to it as exercised in his own tribe. If one of them wasted away, his ailment was almost always imputed to the evil influence of some koradji of another tribe. Their own koradji would, after resort to seclusion or mystery, pronounce from what quarter the malign influence had come, and then the whole tribe was committed to feud or revenge. The koradji were supposed, in some undefined way, to have preternatural knowledge of, or power of communicating with, spiritual influences.

“In connection with the ceremonies of initiation of the young men, a wooden booming instrument, whirled round at the end of a cord, was used. It was used then, and then only. A particular ‘cooe,’ and a particular reply to it, were made known to the young men when they were initiated. Among the symbols used were the form of the cross mounded on the earth; a circle similarly formed, and sinuous parallel lines and other marks on the trees surrounding the site of the ceremony; which sites the women and children were never allowed to approach. The murramai, or rock crystal, was first seen by the young men at their initiation. It was held in reverence. Think of the defeat of tribal reverence which was brought about when a white man put a station close to one of these secret places, and it became a thoroughfare!

“A European who had gained the confidence of the tribe might be permitted to be present at the ceremonies of initiation; and a knowledge of them would be a safe passport for a traveller among a strange tribe, if by any means he could communicate the fact of his initiation. The wonder and the readiness to fraternize shown by strange blacks to an initiated white man seen by them for the first time are very great, accompanied by earnest entreaties not to reveal anything unlawful.

“The means of communication with adjoining, or even more distant tribes, was by persons having the character of heralds. Their persons were sacred even among hostile tribes. From occasional residences in distant places, many of them acquired different dialects fluently. Other men, engaged in affairs of less moment, may be termed ‘special messengers.’ They also were respected scrupulously, I think; but I doubt whether their persons would have been so sacred as those of the heralds, under certain conditions. Their journeys were made in safer

territories. A herald would be selected for dangerous latitudes.

“Infanticide was, I have reason to believe, permitted by the Geawe-gal tribe, though I never knew an instance. They alleged that while their food was abundant and their habits were simple, it was at least uncommon. They were very fond of their children, so far as I could observe.

“I have known the hands of enemies slain in a foray to be carried as trophies for weeks, and I have known cannibalism imputed to a tribe (guiltless of it) on the ground of these hands being found in a camp.

“All implements, the property of a warrior, were interred with his body, and, indeed, every piece of inanimate property he had possessed. The name of a deceased person was never mentioned after his decease; and when a white man carelessly or recklessly has spoken of a dead man by name, I have seen several blacks hang their heads sorrowfully, while one of them would remonstrate, if they had any respect for the speaker; otherwise they would endeavour to turn the conversation.”
