

THE LIFE OF QUEEN MARY ANN . . .

. . . A BRAVE WOMAN

By Mrs. Florrie Munro



MRS. Florrie Munro, who now lives at Caroon, and until recently lived at Bass Hill, near Sydney, gives us another story on the life of Queen Mary Ann, Queen of the New England aborigines. This time one of the first chapters, and the final chapter, in the old Queen's life.

One of the most interesting periods of Queen Mary Ann's life was when she was a shepherdess in the Bundarra district, looking after a big flock of sheep for one of the local farmers.

In those days, a hundred sheep was a big flock, and Mary Ann, who was quite a young woman, was looking after them on her own.

She loved her flock as only a true shepherdess could, and was constantly in search of new and better pastures for them. The drought at that time had dried up all the waterholes and she was obliged to keep the sheep moving along the river bank.

Presently, however, the grass became so scarce she was compelled to take them further back into the hills.

She moved the weak and starving sheep only in the early hours of the morning or the cool of the evening but the dry weather had spoilt the wild fruit and the grass and she was hard pressed to find food for the flock and herself.

The young woman had been alone in the hot dry hills for just on eleven days when she shared the last of her damper with her faithful old dog and realised they had just about reached the end of their tether.

"I'm hungry and weak, just like you are, Toby," she said to the old dog as she patted him, "and we are still several day's journey from home."

While the faithful dog kept the flock together, the courageous young woman summoned up all her strength to break down branches and leaves from the Kurrajong trees in a last effort to keep them from starving.

Slowly the starving woman and her faithful dog and the weakened flock of sheep, hardly able to stand, edged their way slowly back towards the farm.

In the meantime, the farmer and his friends had become alarmed and had set out to investigate.

One morning they found Mary Ann lying unconscious, the victim of starvation and exhaustion, while nearby a weak, thin old dog kept the flock together. When they found Mary Ann, the ants were just beginning to eat her . . . another few hours and it would have been too late.

Mary Ann was given every attention and being the hardy type she was, soon made a complete recovery.

A few days later the rains came, and there was soon grass and water everywhere.



That little incident in the barren hills will serve to illustrate the courage and stubborn determination that went to make up the character of Mary Ann.

It was in 1916, while the first Great War raged, that I saw the final curtain fall on the life of Queen Mary Ann.

Old and blind, the vital spark of life was slowly flickering away when we took her on to the Mines which were only a couple of miles from the little town of Tingha where her daughter Nellie could look after her.

One night she called her daughter and said, "Nellie, I'm going to sleep now. I may not be here in the morning," and as the daughter pulled the bedclothes up over her she heard the old lady saying softly—

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take."

The next morning, the daughter found the old lady lying peacefully in eternal sleep, a soft happy smile on her wrinkled face. Thus ended the life of Queen Mary Ann.

I hope *Dawn* readers have enjoyed the stories of Queen Mary Ann which I have written. All these stories have been true, and have always been an inspiration to me.

