

Kaka Tells a Story

"The Good Old Days"—and Now.

(By E. T. Frost).

As I sat up in the top of a dead kauri tree digging out nice fat grubs for you youngsters, I heard two men, who were sitting down close by having their lunch, talking. One of them was holding a piece of paper and looking hard at it. Every now and then he would talk and say something to his companion. I could not hear all that he was saying, but just caught scraps here and there of the conversation. I heard words like these: "hard times," "depression"; and several times he mentioned an incident which he evidently thought had a good deal to do with these "hard times," as he called them. It was something that apparently had taken place some years ago, and he called it the "Great War." He said that before the "Great War" had taken place how everybody had plenty, and he referred to that time as the "good old days."

When he mentioned that term, "good old days," I wondered if he ever gave a thought to the fact that that term applied to other creatures besides man, and that quite near him in the forest were birds whose near relations had lived in what was the "good old days" of bird life in this country, and that it was not a "Great War" that had brought hard times in our bird world, but just the thoughtless acts of this man's kith and kin.

In those "good old days" we were not confined to a small forest such as the one in which we now live on these Mangamuka Mountains, but we could fly up and down the land as we pleased, and when food was scarce in one place, as it often is here, we could fly off to other places where berries were plentiful and good sweet honey was to be had in abundance, to say nothing of nice fat grubs in the dead wood.

Now when food is scarce on these mountains we have nowhere else to go, and sometimes we become very hungry and weak. My mother used to talk to me often about those times, of which she had heard from her grandparents. They all lived in these mountains, but had many trips up and down the coast. When certain berries were scarce here, and our

tribe thought they would like a change of food, they would all set off on a fine morning in autumn for a flight down the coast. It must have been a wonderful sight to see thousands of our tribe, with red wings flashing in the morning sun, all talking at once, gathering up in the air to set off on the southward journey. At a signal from the leader off the whole host would fly.

Keeping just inland from the sea, where the snow-white breakers could be seen dashing against the rocky coast, they sped on southward to a forest, where some of the wise old leaders had been the year before, and where they knew that at this season of the year food would be in abundance. Here and there a large river and a broad harbour would come into view, on whose banks men and women could be seen digging up something out of the ground. My mother said that these were not the same people whom we now see so plentiful in the land, but were a brown-skinned race, which, like our own bird tribe, has become much less numerous since the white-skinned men and women came to this country. These brown-skinned people, although they took a lot of us for food, did not destroy our feeding grounds, and our race kept up its numbers. Not until the white-skinned people came and cut down and burnt our feeding grounds and homes, and pointed those dreadful fire sticks at us, which made such an awful noise and killed us high up in the trees, did our numbers begin to dwindle.

Now I must tell you of one trait in our characters which led to the undoing of many a fine fat bird which flew away on that autumn morning. It was inquisitiveness, which was not confined to birds only. From scraps of conversation I have heard between people who sometimes wander into the forest, a lot of their children also have it. This is a big word for you young birds, but it means in our common talk "poking your beak into places that you ought not." I will tell you of an incident that occurred on that journey which will illustrate what