

THE ADVENTURES OF NGILGIAN

Ngilgian's adventures may be said to have begun at her birth, somewhere in the late ^{50's}40's or 60's, for she was born in a potato patch, just at the moment her mother was about to be arrested for potato stealing. There ensued much embarrassment, for the owners of the patch; but Wooragan smiled ruefully at the ^{young}white women and said, "This is my baby's 'boojoor' (ground now, and I can't steal any more 'jang-ga'marrain'" ('jang-ga' spirits of the dead - white people; 'marrain' - all vegetable food.) ^{~ spirit food ~}

"Then" said the young 'jang-ga yogga' (^{white women}spirit woman), "we will take care of you and your baby". And in the years that followed Wooragan and her baby divided their days between the 'jang-ga kal' (spirit's fire-white man's house) and their own ^{"Kal"}'kalleep' (fire home, hearth).

Settlement of the south-west of Australia had only taken place some twenty years previous to Ngilgian's birth, and the white settlers' homes were still few and far between. Yet, handicapped as the women in those early days must have been, owing to the crinoline fashion of the times, the young gentlewomen of those days set themselves from the beginning to learn farming and ^{all}domestic duties from the servants they brought with them from their British homes, realising that with the termination of the contract of service the imported helps would seek independence for themselves.

Ngilgian's name was given her by her father - native infants are not named until they can smile ^{of their mothers}in response their names. ^{Her father}

Wedugit was about to spear a "woorark" - a small marsupial, now extinct - but just as he poised his spear for the throw the "woorark" disappeared.

"Ah" he said "yalgal'yookan geej dawning" ("If ^{he} had only

stood a little longer (I would have) speared him").

The little toddling infant was called Ngilgian (from "yalgai") and was given the "woorark" as her personal "totem brother". (*bo'kungur*)

Her father's group totem was the emu which formed the principal meat food of the group, but though all edible totems ~~were~~ ^{might be} eaten by their totemists, Ngilgian never ate a woorark.

"They were my little brothers" she said "and I liked to see them come and eat and not be afraid of me."

Ngilgian was "daajeluk" (betrothed) in infancy to her mother's brother's son - a "yong-gar bo' rung-gur" (kangaroo totem man), and after her babyhood had passed she was frequently left with her adopted "^{white}jang-ga" parents, and shared in the lessons and duties and games of her little white sisters.

She became familiar with the white man's laws, social system, conventions and class distinctions, and also with the laws and customs and social organisation of her own people; but though she learned to speak the correct English spoken by her little white companions, and sang jang-ga hymns, and repeated psalm and collect on Sundays, and learned poem and fable taught to the children by the young mothers of those early days, Ngilgian leaned to the laws and traditions, myths and legends of her own folk.

She would look at the trees and the sea and say "Marri and jerrail, kol-yung and mung-gaitch" (mahogany, jarra, wattle, Banksia) and all trees and plants and roots are our 'moorurt' (relations), and many of them are our totem fathers and brothers, and they give us gum to eat, and honey, and marrain' (all vegetable food); and the great sea is our 'Mamman Waddarn' (Father Sea), and when he is not sulky he sends plenty of 'kalda' (mullet) and other big fish into our rivers and bays, so that when we get tired of one kind of food another 'bo' rung-gur' (totem brother) is ready for us.

"White men"

"'Jang-ga' must 'beena, beena, beena' (dig, dig, dig) and work for their 'warrain' (native potato) and baragood ("very good", the early name for the white man's flour); but our 'marrain' (vegetable food) and meat and water are our 'bo' rung-gurmat" (brother stock) and when we obey our totem laws and do not make mock of our 'bo' rung-gur', or destroy their 'koolong-gur' (^{"children"} buds, flowers, young of anything) our 'bo' rung-gur' come themselves. If we broke the 'bo' rung-gur' laws our food would all go away and 'yung-ar' and 'yog-ga' and 'koolung-gur' (men, women and children) would all die. 'Demma Goombe (^{our} ancestors) obeyed the laws and told them to our fathers and our fathers tell them to us.

"When 'jang-ga' (white people) first came to our 'boojoor' (ground) our 'mam-man' (fathers) said they were the spirits of our dead who had gone to 'Kurannup' (the home of the dead beyond the sea), and were coming back to ^{visit} us; but when more and more 'jang-ga' came, different and 'wakkain' (bad wicked) over the 'waddarn', ^{sea} 'yung-ar' and 'yogga' were killed by the ^{jang-ga} meen-ya bo' mung-gur' (spirit ^{smell}, killing - the odour of the white man). Our fathers and mothers died quickly and went to 'Kurannup' and their 'bo' rung-gur' went away with them. 'Daaj' and 'marrain' (meat and vegetable food) went away with their brothers and their 'koolong-gur' (children). *all our own native foods.*

Up and down the coast Ngilgian wandered in childhood with her local group. She learned to scrape and soften the kangaroo skins that made the 'bwokka' (cloaks) of her people; and dug ^{always potatoes} 'warrain' and performed all the tasks and duties of Bibbulmun women; for Ngilgian belonged to the great Bibbulmun race, whose territory stretched from Jurien Bay to some point beyond Esperance - the largest homogeneous group of aborigines in all Australia.

wakkain
a potato like
root very
white & liked
by the white
settlers

marrain
is the term
for all
vegetable food.

Between times, she worked with the "jang-ga yogga" (white woman). She nursed one little white baby that afterwards became the State's Premier, and she was always liked and trusted by the whites, for her early associations having been amongst gentlefolk she had unconsciously absorbed their ways and manners and fine principles; but the wild in her blood was ever uppermost and none of the joys of "jang-ga" life could equal the delight in taking a dancing part in the "ke'ning" (corroborees) of her own folk, or joining in the totem songs and listening to the myths and traditions of "Demma Goomber" (great grandparents) times.

Ngilgian knew every "winnaitch" (sacred, forbidden) spot from end to end of her "boojoor" and many a tale would she tell of the evil fortune or death that ~~came~~ ^{while men} to the "jang-ga" who destroyed "winnaitch" tree or spring or sacred ground.

"Near Yinding-up" she would say, "there was a '^{sacred} winnaitch' tree, and every time we passed near-by our mothers got rushes and swept the ground and cleaned it and put clean rushes over it, but no one ever touched the tree, for it was 'winnaitch' and sacred.

"By and by when 'jang-ga' came and built their 'maia' (huts) near the 'winnaitch' tree, the tree was angry, and made noises that frightened the 'jang-ga' and the 'jang-ga' said, "We will have to kill that tree that makes such noises". And they got their 'kojja' (axes) and cut down the 'winnaitch' tree that no 'yung-ar' or 'yogga' had ever touched, and all the 'yung-ar' ran away from there in anger at the 'jang-ga' for breaking the '^{Ancestral} Demma Goomber' law.

"^{White men's} 'Jang-ga's' 'marrain' (potatoes, corn etc.) would not grow near the broken tree and the noises still went on, and frightened the 'jang-ga' so that at last they had to go away from that 'boojoor' (ground.)

"^{They} ~~Jang-ga~~ 'laughed at the 'yung-ar' when they told them of 'winnaitch' places that must not be trodden, and once when a

mocking 'jang-ga' danced on a sacred spot, his little boy was taken by the spirits to the 'jang-ga ga-rup' (caves of the south-west - spirit holes) and the boy's father said to the 'yung-ar': 'Find my little 'koolong' (child) and I will keep your 'winnaitch' ground sacred always.'

"And 'Dārungit', ~~and~~ 'karder' (long-tailed iguana) 'bo'rung-gur' (totem brother) 'bul-ya-ed' (clairvoyanced) the 'koolong' and said to his younger brother. 'Go to the 'jang-ga garup' quickly and bring back the 'koolong'. And the brother ran and ran a long, long way, and found the little 'koolong' beside the 'jang-ga-garup'. The spirits of the cave had nearly turned him into a spirit, but the 'karder bo'rung-gur' made him alive and brought him to his father.

"All the ^{caves} 'jang-ga garup' are filled with the spirits of the dead who went only halfway to 'Kurrannup' and turned back again. They are all sulky spirits and will kill and eat any 'yung-ar' or 'yogga' or 'koolong' who go near their 'garup' (cave, hole)."

Ngilgian's 'daajeluk' (betrothed) condition held lightly with her until her 'daajeluk kord' (husband or wife) came to claim her.

"You have another 'korda yogga' at your 'maia' (hut)" she said "I won't make your 'kal' (fire) unless you send her away."

"But she is my 'daajeluk kord' too," said the bewildered man.

"I will be the only 'korda yog' in my 'korda's maia'" said Ngilgian.

Her 'daajeluk' looked at the fine frame, as sturdy and big as his own, and, deciding that force would be futile, he made a virtue of necessity and told Ngilgian "he didn't want an unwilling 'daajeluk' - he could get plenty 'korda yog'".

"Kubbain' (perhaps! you might!)" grinned Ngilgian.

"Go and get them. I will find my own 'korda'".

Ngilgian's colour and type and "class" was "Manitchmat" (white cockatoo stock) - the fairer of the two primary hordes that inhabited the southwest corner of the continent. The darker and ^{stockier} ~~short~~ type being called "Wordungmat" (crow stock). These two types formed the fundamental divisions of the Bibbulmun race; and though marriages between them - they formed the only legal intermarrying pairs - had been the aboriginal law and rule from time immemorial, there yet existed this difference between them: "Manitchmat" could always be distinguished from "Wordungmat" by their fairer colouring, smaller hands and feet, and finely proportioned bodies. *clear skin.*

Ngilgian was a true "Manitchmat" of the Tondarup subdivision, and prided herself on her fairness of skin and the small hands and feet that all Tondarup women possessed.

Her dismissal of her "daajeluk" was a serious offence, that, in the old days, would most certainly have meant her death; but, with ^{white man's} "jang-ga" law obtaining, she knew she was safe; so she hunted about for a ^{husband} "kord" more to her own liking, and, unhappily, her first choice fell on a halfcaste - one of the very few of that breed begotten in the south-west.

"Whitey-Brown-George" as he was called, was soon made aware of Ngilgian's preference, and graciously accepted her advances, and the couple were started on their way in life by the ^{Bussell} "~~jang-ga~~" family with whom Ngilgian had sojourned so happily.

But Ngilgian's happiness was shortlived. "Whitey-Brown-George" had a roving eye, and his real taste lay in the girls of his own ^{Caste} breed. Ngilgian's quick intuition soon realised his worthlessness. She cast him off as summarily as she had dismissed her "daajeluk".

"I made you my 'korda'" she said, "though you are

neither ^{White man} 'jang-ga' nor ^{Dark man} 'yung-ar'. You like your own half-breeds best! Well, go to them. I don't want to keep you."

Ngilgian walked out of the new "maia" and resumed her single life.

Later on, she picked and chose her mates as she pleased, and discarded them at will, her most effective method being one she had learned from a "Biddy Moriarty" amongst the ^{fresh} white settlers. Biddy's one weapon was a bucket of cold water thrown on her drunken, "barging" husband; and when Ngilgian saw the effects of this weapon of offence and defence she applied it at once to her lazy or unfaithful 'Korda', none of whom ever returned for a repetition of the dose.

Ngilgian had one great passion, however, apart from her amatory adventures. She loved and coveted every dog, cur, or mongrel that came her way. She would work for weeks for no other payment than a little puppy she had fancied. Her collection increased in this way until she had some dozen or more mongrels following at her heels; and then entered the inevitable policeman and his gun - and a dogless and wailing Ngilgian.

Between husband-discarding and mongrel-collecting, Ngilgian passed her days, liked by all the white women for herself, but "shooed" away for her thievish mongrel followers.

She was about sixty years old when the writer met her on the Native Reserve at the foot of the Darling Range, W.A. ¹⁹⁰¹⁻² She had then thirty-two dogs, seven goats, a dozen fowls, four aboriginal suitors and one halfcaste aspirant.

A kindly, understanding Government ^{during John Forrest's Premiership} had given her a plot of ground, fenced, for flower or vegetable growing, a hut, and even a double bed and spring mattress - for Ngilgian's dogs were her blankets at night, and thirty-two dogs and a hefty woman required a full-sized double bed.

It was a weird sight, indeed, to look in upon Ngilgian in the early morning, and see her living blanket stir to wake-

fulness and shrill noisiness, settling down again as soon as the visitor was recognised.

The dogs were of every breed of mongrel imaginable; the largest being a cross between a kangaroo dog, bull-terrier, mastiff and Newfoundland, and the smallest a ^{pure bred} little King Charles spaniel, not a foot in length, and with only two working legs, half an eye and rickets.

Between these two was a collection of every type of mongrel that Western Australia had produced to date. One in particular comes to mind: Ngilgian adored it, and called it "Yung-ar" (man) and made a little red coat for it, because it had not a single hair on its body. Its head alone showed some dozen types: its legs - fore and aft - were bowed like a successful jockey's, and its tail was the exact semblance of a pig's. Its little flea-infested body was black and shiny, and its gait generally spelled "dog-roue-ism" at its worst.

Yung-ar was also distinguished by an even set of teeth, apparently no canines amongst them, and to show off this peculiarity Ngilgian had adopted a phrase: "Four thousand four hundred and one dogs, but only one "Yung-ar"", and Yung-ar would squirm and grin and show all his teeth, and wriggle his pig-tail and squint up adoringly at his mistress and protector.

Ngilgian loved them all, fought their battles, and refused to believe evil of them.

She "bul-ya-ed" (clairvoyanced) the coming of the policeman and his gun almost as soon as he rode out of his yard, and the moment she "felt inside" (and she was never wrong), that the policeman was coming out to shoot her dogs, she got two strong bags - kept for these emergencies - and putting her halt, maimed, and blind pets into them swung the bags over her shoulder and vanished into the fastness of the Darling Range. From a vantage point there, or a rock shelter, she watched the arrival of the man of law and "bul-ya-ed" him to

find out if he were returning to his home or intended to remain and catch her in the darkness.

Every time Ngilgian won, and her thirty-two deformities kept the camp alive - and the white settlers in the vicinity raging over rifled henroosts and fowl nests.

Young kids, and occasionally a sick fowl, were sometimes added to the living blankets at night, yet in spite of dogs and goats and fowls, there were five suitors for Ngilgian's hand when she was well into her sixtieth year: Monnop, of the dingo totem; Woolberr, of the black swan totem; Bimba, of the turkey totem; and Baaburgurt of the salmon? *oz* *wallet* ('kalda') totem.

Baaburgurt and Woolberr were almost blind, but Bimba and Monnop were only a little over sixty, and these two bashed and fought each other whenever they got together on the Reserve, always hoping that Ngilgian would accept the victor.

Baaburgurt relied upon a "soothing" tongue, and Woolberr on his gifts as a singer and dancer,

Ngilgian regarded all four with a complacent eye - and then entered the young halfcaste on the Reserve, young enough to be Ngilgian's grandson. Perhaps memories of "Whitey-Brown-George" stirred Ngilgian. At any rate, she turned a favourable eye on Jimmy and said to him, in the hearing of the others: "I will take you, and when I go out washing you can stay and mind my goats, and my dogs and fowls, and I will always give you plenty to eat - 'marrain' and 'daaj' (vegetables and meat) you shall have."

Jimmy saw endless days of lying in the sun and shade, or by the fire in the hut on rainy days, and plenty of food without having to work for it, and he accepted Ngilgian and her conditions.

But the pair reckoned without the rejected suitors, who

joined forces in a rage against "the yellow dog who never had a father".

Monnop threatened him with physical violence, Bimba with deadly magic, Woolberr sang evil things at him, and Baaburgurt hit out wildly with his stick every time he could get within reach of the halfcaste odour.

Jimmy fled, preferring his own poor life to the doubtful comforts of life under such strenuous conditions!

Baaburgurt "turned dog" in a sense, condoled with Ngilgian, condemned Monnop and Bimba and Woolberr for their brutality to Jimmy, and so soothed Ngilgian in her sorrow that it was not surprising to find him on his way to Ngilgian's hut a few days after Jimmy's flight. Baaburgurt entered the hut, the dogs protesting loudly or feebly according to size and strength. Then came the procession of goats, the fowls, and Ngilgian bringing up the rear.

In due time quiet settled down on the camp, the discarded suitors nursing their grievances at separate fires. Very early next morning a great medley of sounds, in which dogs, goats, fowls and Baaburgurt's quavering voice might be distinguished, issued from Ngilgian's "maia" and presently the door opened and ~~p~~ Baaburgurt was thrust forth with a bucket of water thrown after him to quicken his movements.

Baaburgurt howled and roared, and struck out wildly with his heavy stick, which unfortunately tapped one of the mongrels snapping at his heels. For once the bucket of water was supplemented by aboriginal invective.

It was a cold, misty morning, and a dripping, shivering, and beaten Baaburgurt came crying to the writer's camp, Ngilgian having calmly shut her door and resumed her slumbers.

Monnop and Bimba saw the plight of their brother man, and, getting blankets, clothes and hot tea, all three came to his assistance. They stripped and rubbed him, warmed and fed

him, while he wailed in minute detail his experiences as a twenty-four hour husband. Over their tea and damper they were discussing the "eternal woman" when from Ngilgian's hut came the strains of lament - not for Baaburgurt, but for Jimmy.

The words of the lament had no apparent connection with love, but sadness and loneliness were expressed in the tune - a soft, minor musical chant, with a rather haunting cadence. The words referred to a "duel between the strong wild wind (male) and the soft rolling clouds (female); the cruel wind tearing them apart as a boomerang tears the branches on its destructive way."

Softly and slowly the strains came to us, for Ngilgian was feeling very lonely; and, curiously the strain affected the four "rejects" who became silent and ^{still} ~~still~~ as they listened to the rise and fall of the mournful little melody.

Ngilgian presently came out, milked her goats and ate her meal.

Monnop said "Ngilgian should be my 'korda yog' for she is Manitchmat and I am Wordungmat"

"You are Manitch" he said to Baaburgurt, and turning to Bimba, he said "You don't belong to our group at all, you come from 'koggarrara' (east) and are not a Bibbulmun."

Bimba resented the tone more than the words, and distraction was at once forthcoming in a renewed fight between the two, Woolberr singing his right and title as a Bibbulmun Wordungmat to Ngilgian's favor.

In the midst of it all, the amazing Ngilgian came over with a billycan of tea, and a fine helping of damper and jam, which she laid beside Baaburgurt. "I don't want you" she said, "I want no 'kord', but I threw 'gabbi' (water) on you, and I am giving you 'marrain' for drenching you."

Monnop and Bimba stopped fighting to look on, but Ngilgian took no notice whatever of them.

Jimmy never again ventured on the Reserve and Monnop and Bimba departed for a while returning again and again to press their suit, but Ngilgian would have none of them, and after a terrific bout, during which Monnop's jaw bone was broken, and Bimba's ribs smashed in, both men retired to their districts, where they died. *heard the cry of the swans coming to nest. On his totem ground at Gungah, walking along the railway track from Cannington to Gungah*
Blind Woolberr was run over by a train and killed, and Baarburgurt died of loneliness on his own ground in the Capel district the last member of the ^(Kalda) "mullet" totem group of that area.

Ngilgian lived on the Reserve until one day the policeman caught her napping and put every one of her half-starved deformities out of its misery. Then she shook the dust of the Reserve off her shapely feet, and wended her way to some white women friends of her early days, by whom she was fed and clothed and welcomed; for Ngilgian had never adopted the white man's vices, and neither drank nor smoked, & she always responded to courtesy with her own native good manners.

The late Lord Forrest, who knew Ngilgian from childhood, befriended her until his death. The Premier whom she had nursed as a baby, came to see her on the Reserve, and left her with a gold remembrancer for old time's sake; and when one of Western Australia's many splendid Governors - the late Sir Frederic Bedford - and Lady Bedford, visited the writer at her first native camp, in the early 1900's, Ngilgian's gentle manners and correct English both astonished and interested the party. She had taught her dogs several little tricks, and, one by one, she put them through their paces, ending up with a song in which "Maato" (the kangaroo dog, mastiff etc. etc.) joined with his paws on Ngilgian's shoulders, the performers achieving "succes fou".

After the little informal visit, a well-filled hamper

came to Ngilgian "from Government House", and Ngilgian sent a message of thanks to "The King's Brother" for the kindly gift.

It may be that Ngilgian still survives on a new Reserve, far from her old home, and friends; or, as it is hoped, she may have passed through the "Goomber Mamman Waddarn" (Great Father Sea) to her "Kurannup" home, where she will find her own people, and see again the same hills and vales and rivers of her beautiful south-western country in Kurrannup.

never see men in Quela & the line. has seen a...
the women speak of a...
The Bibbulmun groups were probably so called because they always had "many women" in the group. A woman had to take her stick (digging) when husband with her on sep. & if she was seen without it by any man, that man could use her, without having to trade with her man.

In every group, both Double Pass were - the women were always an asset! at the group gatherings being negotiated temporarily with the visiting groups. Who pairs in butler goods. The Bibbulmun groups were probably so called because they always had "many women" in the group. A woman had to take her stick (digging) when husband with her on sep. & if she was seen without it by any man, that man could use her, without having to trade with her man.

A certain thing (carroburra) called Wanna we had gone round the coast once every 25 years - it took 25 years to do the full 'Wal' names of Australia & returning to its starting point.

I heard of the name & the traditional dance from some of the native women I was among the Bibbulmun. They called it - the Wanna we. (women's stick) When "you are it & it" Quela in 1913. it arrives while I was camped there on the Boundary Dam area N.C. It ends there - as it requires a big stick especially of wood.