

THE COUNTRY OF THE SPIRIT BABIES

When I was a very little child, and that is a long time ago, some "grown-ups" must have told me many fairy stories which I loved, because I was a lonely child and wanted company to play with. All the stories told to me were of fairy children or fairy animals and birds and fairy trees that the little fairy spirits loved and played hide and seek in, and small lizards that looked "creepy-crawly" but were nice to every child who was a good child, who never hurt any of the little creatures that loved them. There were haunted bushes and lovely little flowering hollows in those "fairies' playground" where fairies might be seen sometimes by little girls who loved all little birds and animals and did not tease them.

Our dear Homeland which the grown-ups call "England", has many little fairy places all over it. A place called "Cornwall" is full of magic hawthorn bushes and caves which must be shunned by little girls and boys; and there were other places called "Wales, Scotland, and Ireland", and the wonderful "Isle of Man" who had three feet, and many "hidey" places where little creatures only came out in the moonlight. I was never afraid to go and look for them but I never saw any of them, though the stories about them were always entrancing to hear. They always came to me in dreams and often when I was being told a story sitting by the window in the moonlight, I would see something floating or flying about and someone would say, "they all love the moon and play about in her light", but I could only think I saw the shadow of their little wings.

A All sorts of little fairy creatures were to be seen by children, and these stories and fairy tales were kept in the minds and hearts of the "grown-ups", who had heard the stories from their own dear mothers and grand-mothers; and I know if you were to go to-day to a Welsh place called by a big name, "Peumarmawr", there will be a little Welsh woman, very very old, who will be wearing a darling little white cap on her head, and on top of the cap she wears a big black hat, and she will say in welcoming you, "sith-er-ee-duk", which means "how do you do", and you will say "thank you", and I am sure if you ask her nicely she will tell you a fairy story that she had been told when she was a little

child like you.

If you love fairy stories, you will always listen to them and even when you are growing old you will remember them. And that is how I learnt this beautiful story of the little fairy black babies of their own land in the North West of this great land of Australia, that British people found for England. The story was told to me by Billing-gi, whose father, Lee-berr, owned the big area that is now known as "Broome" area, North West Australia.

Billing-gi was a Spirit Baby of "Jimbin", the fairy land that was owned by little spirit babies called "Ngargalulla". In this Jimbin country the babies lived with all their little fairy brothers and sisters, and fairy birds and animals and fishes and flowers and trees. Billing-gi was a little Ngargalulla baby there, and all Jimbin land belonged to the Ngargalulla.

"Grown-ups" called Billing-gi's people "the black or dark people of Broome, North West Australia", and Billing-gi's people lived and owned the land his father called "Jajjala", which white people call "Broome", but Billing-gi's own baby-land was the Ngargalulla country that all the little black babies come from and which they call "Jimbin". No "grown-up" could see Jimbin except in dreams because the baby-land was a special land underneath Jajjala land and belonged to little Ngargalulla babies only.

Long, long ago a great ancestor called "Yamminga" made three countries: there was the sky country, called "Koorrwall", the ground country, called "Jajjala", and the underground country, called "Jimbin", and it is of the Jimbin country that this story was told to me by Billing-gi.

Jimbin was the beautiful home of all little baby spirits called "Ngargalulla", and of all young spirit animals and baby birds and baby fishes. There were little hills, and plains, and rivers and murmuring streams and lovely trees and flowers and grasses and seeds and fruits, and by the little streams and pools the Ngargalulla sat and played with each other and with the tiny fishes and crabs and all the little creatures living along the banks, and all along the banks grew flowers and sweet smelling baby bushes. The flowers and sweet smelling plants opened their leaves and leaned down and touched the babies as they floated down the streams. All the little spirit birds sang and called to the Ngargalulla and they could go up and sit with the birds on the tree

branches, or hide among the thickly leaved shrubs. The birds and tiny animals and reptiles would play with each other among the leaves and the Ngargalulla would float with the little sea birds along the creeks and streams, and when the Ngargalulla came to the sea the little sea creatures came up to them and swam with them, for nothing ever hurt the Ngargalulla or the birds or animals. No anger, nor pain, nor death, ever came to the fiary babies of Ngargalulla land.

There were no dark nights in Ngargalulla land. The sun, moon and stars, sat down with the Ngargalulla and the little snakes, reptiles and turtles and all the sea creatures played jolly sea games with them.

No grown-ups could visit Ngargalulla land except in dreams. When Jajjala men dreamed of Ngargalulla land they saw the babies playing with land and sea creatures, going down with them to the bottom of the sea and floating among the deep sea fishes, and the babies would stroke their deep sea friends and swim or dive with them. A little Ngargalulla would join the porpoises and turtles in their play in the sea or on the beach, and the birds would come and join the groups on the sea-beaches and wave their wings to the little Ngargalulla friends to come and rest with them in the shady branches; and the Ngargalulla and the birds would play at chasing each other round the flowers and all the flowers leaned over and touched their baby friends and all sorts of tiny sea creatures would come and play with them on the beach.

Ngargalulla land was filled with spirit babies, and flowers and plants and all the young sea and land creatures were always round and about the babies and all the edible foods of tree and bush that grew in Jajjala country were about them. When the flowers and all the edible foods stopped growing in Jajjala land they all came down to Ngargalulla land until it was time to go up to Jajjala to open their leaves and flowers and fruits again. The little Ngargalulla could always see the land of their fathers, for spirit babies were free to go everywhere, in the sky and under the sea, in all the trees and all round about, and they also went up to Jajjala and saw their sisters and brothers, but the sisters and brothers could not see them as they were spirit babies. Every grown-up person in Jajjala land was once a Ngargalulla baby belonging to Ngargalulla land and all the little spirit babies knew all this and knew all the grown-ups in Jajjala. When the Ngargalulla wanted to be a real earth baby, he

would always chose his own father and go to him in his dreams.

A Jajjala man would perhaps be sleeping and dreaming under a tree and in his dreams he sees a little Ngargalulla standing close to him, and he says to the wee baby, "Who is your father?", and the Ngargalulla says to him, "You are my father." Then the man who is to be his father looks round where the little Ngargalulla is standing and he sees some good edible foods or some young animal or vegetable or fruit tree. The father remembers everything he sees round and about and while he is noticing all these things the Ngargalulla goes over to where his future earthly mother lies asleep and going inside her he is carried by her until by and by he is born in Jajjala land, a little wee baby. The Jajjala men call all thier little Ngargalulla babies "lam-mar nal-ma", which means "fair-haired".

For a little while after he is born he remains a Ngargalulla and his mother rubs him with charcoal and le-da (fat) every day to darken his wee body, and one day the baby smiles at his earthly mother and then he is a spirit baby no more, but a wee little lam-mar nal-ma babba (fair-haired baby).

Everything his father sees round and about the Ngargalulla in his dreams belongs to the little baby boy, his father knew where all these things are plentiful in Jajjala and he says, "Those things I saw when Ngargalulla came to me in my dreams are all my little son's "Jalnga" (totems) and by and by when he is a big man he will dream the increase of all his grown-ups foods, because that is the "spirit power" that every little spirit baby brings with him from Ngargalulla land to its earthly home in Jajjala".

When Ngargalulla grows up to manhood and dreaming time, he dreams the increase of his "jalnga" foods and no-one else can dream them but himself, for they belong to his own baby-ground and had been seen there by his own father whom he had chosen. If his "jalnga" were a favourite food of his father's people they would eat and eat it when it is ripe and come to him and say, "dream more, dream more", so that they could have plenty of it. If his Ngargalulla "jalnga" were some specially liked seed or vegetable or fruit, he would dream he was in Jimbin land again, sitting near his "jalnga tree" and he would pluck the seeds, and chewing them he would scatter them all about him. By and by when his people and friends saw beautiful rays coming from the setting sun, they

would laugh happily and say, "Yeer-gi-li seeds will be many". No little Ngargalulla who becomes an earth boy or girl ever hurt their Ngargalulla "janga" flowers or fruit or young of any animals or birds or reptiles that were their "jalnga" and so their foods were always plentiful.

No Jajjala man could dream of a Ngargalulla baby unless he had a "ranjee" (a spirit or sould" within himself, and no man could claim a baby as his own if he had not dreamt that the Ngargalulla came to him in his dreams. When Wallungan of Jajjala accompanied a white man from Broome to Perth in the early days of the white man's coming to Australia, he dreamed while in Perth that a Ngargalulla came to him and told him he was his father, and Wallungan looked around in his dreams and saw a great lot of "Wan-julain" (long edible bean) growing near the Ngargalulla. When he returned to Jajjala some years later he knew the little boy his woman had carried was his own Ngargalulla dream baby.

All the Ngargalulla babies know all about their father's laws and avoidances, and jalnga while they are Ngargalulla, and no Ngargalulla ever comes to the wrong father. If the dreaming man is a "Boorong" man, Ngargalulla will say, "I am a Kaimera and you are my Boorong father", and if the dreaming man is a "Kaimera" man the little Ngargalulla will say, "I am a Boorong and you are my Kaimera father", for "Kaimera" and "Boorong" are fathers and sons for ever.

The Jajjala men's marriage laws were very strict and if any man broke these laws he would be killed by his brothers.

Billing-gi learned all his lessons from his father. He must not speak to his young sisters or young mothers and they must never try to play with him. His big brothers and fathers and uncles and grand-fathers all helped him to learn the Jajjala laws that were made for them all by the "Yamminga" spirits of long ago. The men made small boomerangs and spears and spear-throwers and the boy learned to swim and catch fish and throw boomerangs at birds or animals and so become a good man, able to kill animals and reptiles and great birds and big fish, and while he was learning to do all these things he had to find the nests of the very small honey-flies or bees that build nests in the tops of high trees, and he studied the tracks of every living thing and especially the tracks of langoor (opossum) because langoor loved honey above all other food, and Billing-gi liked to bring honey to his fathers.

Billing-gi was always learning and his teachers were always strict. When he found honey bees' nests he gave the honey to his fathers or uncles and grand-fathers and if he caught a big fish his grown-up relations ate it without sharing it with him.

He was a very little boy when he was taken to the young men's own camp and was separated for ever from his sisters and mothers and he had to find his own food, grubs and small animals or reptiles.

He became a great boomerang and spear-thrower; all the grown-up Broome men made and played and hit with boomerangs without losing the animal or bird they aim at and Billing-gi learned his man's place in the camps for them. They played a great boomerang game of sending their boomerangs up to a great height manoeuvring the boomerang so that it gyrated flatly at a great height, one end being set alight so that each young flier knew his own weapon. The weapon that remained highest and kept longest in the upper air was the winner.

The baby Ngargalulla in his fairy home of Ngargalulla land is the happiest little baby in all his world of fairies and among all his companions. They all move about in the air or the deep sea or the sky and stars and frolic in the sea and the small creeks and in the flowering bushes round and about their fairy land, because they are spirit babies and the whole spirit land belongs to them and to their spirit friends, the birds and animals and reptiles and all the sea creatures, but they are never seen by their earth country and when a grown-up sees or feels something that is not visible to him he will say, "that must be a little baby Ngargalulla coming to see his brother or sister", and the man will pick up a leaf or flower bud and throw it in the air to them and say, "go and see your sisters and brothers".

In some quiet moonlight nights, after their day's junting and having eaten their fill of animals or birds or the grubs or seeds or soft fruits which have been gathered for them by their women, the grand-fathers and old fathers and brothers will sometimes remember their own Ngargalulla baby time. They know all about the fairy babies still in Ngargalulla land and some old Tcham-moo (grand-father) will begin telling stories about Ngargalulla that his old grand-father told him when he was a little boy; and these stories will be old, old stories and full of magic, and he will also tell stories of the big fish which his people know and which white people call "dugong" and they call "koo-doong-an" and the great

opossum string nets which they caught the big dugong with, all the men bobbing up and down and up and down in the deep water as the great sea fish tries to escape: and when they caught him at last they made a great fire to call all their friends to the feast and they would all eat and listen with much laughter to the fight with the great fish, and all the younger men would whisper to each other, "we will get a big fish by and by".

And there were stories of the "Waj-joonoo", the great bats, that come in mobs to Jajjala to feast on the edible plants and fruits which were ripe for only a short season and there would be great slaughter of these huge bats as they hung from the branches of the trees. And the big "Wan-goor" (blue crane) that gave them the blue crane dance, and sometimes if grand-father was in a happy mood he would suddenly stand up and perform some light movements of the crane's graceful body, and the group round him would be keen listeners to the stories and by and by would imitate the movements of the crane dance.

When the old men told of the days ~~ix~~ of their own young manhood there was always silence in the camp. The women and young girls sat apart from the men, and when some stories that the women must not hear were told, some older man amongst the men's group would call out just one word which would mean "go away" or "hide your head", and another word would be said later if the women were allowed to return and listen again to the stories.

The little Ngargalulla boy who had come to his father as a dream baby grew out of his babyhood very quickly. While still a very little boy he learned that all his mothers and sisters and grandmothers were not allowed to play with him, but had to feed him with fat grubs and other good foods. Very soon he would be encouraged to go among the men and one of his father's younger brothers would thrust a small turkey bone through his nose and tell him not to cry, saying to him, that he would soon be a man like them, and they made him small boomerangs and spears because these are man's weapons, and these small ones were his own, and so he began his young manhood. He was encouraged to go amongst the men and learn from them by contact with them. His big brothers drew the tracks of every bird and animal and fish and he learned these lessons thoroughly and every little success was greeted with a shout of approval.

And so the little boy learned in the "school" of his woom people, through some nine hard and gruesome stages, before he could be a "womba" (man).

His grand-fathers encouraged him to seek their company and from them he heard many an ancient legend that had come down to them in "Yamminga" time. There were three special things they told him, but only after they had found that he had dreamed of being in Ngargalulla land and a little Ngargalulla had come before him and said, "You are my father". He told his grand-father of his dream and his grand-father, Leeberr, knew now that his grand-son had a "ranjee" (spirit or doul) and the older men gathered together and the young man learned the significance of this ranjee within him, which enabled him to dream of Ngargalulla land and see the spirit babies there that would eventually come to him as his children.

There were two other kinds of "ranjee spirits". There was the ranjee or spirit of Thunder and Lightning, which took male and female shape. The male ranjee controlled the forked lightning and the female spirit controlled and manipulated the sheet lightning. Sometimes one ranjee only would be seen in the lightning and the Sorcerer (magician) in the camp could see the lightning spirit and would catch the forked lightning in his left hand and so prevent it from killing his people. The forked lightning spirit was left-handed. The female spirit of the sheet lightning was more sulky than the forked lightning man spirit: sometimes she would bring too much rain and then the Sorcerer in the camp would catch her and take the rope from her with which she pulled the sheet lightning to and fro. She also was left-handed.

The third ranjee or spirit was the spirit of a dead man, which instead of going to IOMURN, the home of all dead natives beyond the great western sea, returned to its own ground, haunting certain shady places in its own group. This spirit had been a real Womba (man). Strange men passing near the spirit's shady place were punished with sickness and death, and all the home people of the area avoided the spirit's shady place. The shade spirit was always a man who came back to haunt his own ground.

The grand-fathers told the young grandsons all these things that they might learn during their years of learning how to be good and strong.

Billing-gi was always in the charge of some of his father's people or

his mother's brothers (uncles) and between whom and the boy there was always a special affection and warm friendship. His uncles might promise him a wife and more than one uncle might promise him a baby girl for a wife, while he was still a little boy, but during all his years of learning to be a good man and a good hunter and fighter he was forbidden all intercourse with his mother and sisters and all the women of his people. All women and children were the burden bearers of the whole group and must hunt and find the best of foods for their men. They hunted foods, grubs, and small game, and they crushed the seeds for damper and performed every service required of them by their men. There was no personal contact between men and women, boys and girls. The native woman's only place in Jajjala was servitude towards the man. Their inferiority began with their childhood and ended only in death.

Jajjala men had kept their strict group and marriage and other laws that had come down to them from their Yamminga ancestors and up to and after the coming of the white man they continued to keep their group laws and marriage laws.

Their legends were to them real stories of happenings and of people in "Yamminga" time. Their sacred and secret wooden and other emblems had come down to them from the far off ancestors, and were extraordinarily interesting. The most sacred and secret wooden emblem of the Jajjala men was the long carved flat wooden emblem called "Kalleegooroo" and old Leeberr and his people were the last custodians of these ancient emblems.

Yamminga in the long ago had made them a road to Koorrwall (sky) country by placing a long, long Kal-lee-goo-roo between Jajjala and Koorrwall and so they had three countries: Jimbin, which was the Ngargalulla land, Jajjala, their own earth ground and Koorrwall the sky country.

Women went up and down the Koorrwall road to find food for their men, and young women and children also went up and down the sky road, but they had to be back in Jajjala or Koorrwall country before sunset. They could sleep at either place, but must not stop half way on the road. They found food in the Koorrwall country and always either reached Koorrwall where they could stay the night or return to Jajjala land, but they must not sit down on the road. One day a big big

group of women and children started for Koorrwall but they lingered on the way so that they were only half way when they saw the sun about to hide itself. The women were too lazy to hurry, and as they always carried their fire-sticks they said, "We will sleep here and go on the Koorrwall to-morrow", and so they lighted the fire and the fire burnt the "Kal-lee-goo-roo road" and broke in two and those who were on the Koorrwall side had to remain there for ever and those who were on the Jajjala road never came back to Jajjala. All the Jajjala men now know that the dark spot in the "Milky Way" is that part of the Kalleegooroo road to Koorrwall where the women had burnt the Yamminga road. No boys could hear this story until they had become fathers of Ngargalulla spirit babies.

In Ngargalulla land the big turtle, called Koolibal, was the great playmate of the Ngargalulla and often a little Ngargalulla would go into the sea and come back with Koolibal, and a great many little babies would jump upon him and fly over him and lie down with him and he would put his head out and move round and round and have great games with his little Ngargalulla friends. Koolibal, which the white people call the great green turtle, loved his little baby friends and would often go back with them into the sea and all the little fish and crabs would play too, as it was always playtime in Ngargalulla land. The Jajjala men never forgot they were once Ngargalulla babies even when they were old old men, and they always dreamed the increase of their food jalnga totems, so that the Jajjala men had always plenty of fruit and honey and nuts and roots, and every vegetable and seed and animal in all Jajjala belonged to the men who had been once Ngargalulla babies. They were always glad to dream of the increase of sweet growing foods and their Ngargalulla dream home was always in their hearts.

The Ngargalulla country was just the same as Jajjala country where their fathers had all the foods and seeds and honey and berries, but their foods had to be increased by dreaming and all the men must keep Yamminga laws and never do any wrong.

The little Ngargalulla ranjee (spirit) remained inside them even when they became very old men and they were always happy to dream they were in their baby country and watching the Ngargalulla play with Koolibal, the turtle, or Pajjal-burra, the porpoise.

Sometimes when an old man dreamed he was in Ngargalulla land, he would see a great number of dead Pajjal-burra on the beach and when he woke from his dreams he remembered the dead fish he saw and he told it to the old men and the old men knew there was going to be a death amongst them - they whispered to each other and said, "Burndoor will die". For Burndoor had the porpoise for his jalnga and the jalnga goes away before its owner, the man, dies.

And so they lived and kept their laws in Jajjala booroo until the white man came amongst them. They were frightened of the white people and though they still dreamed and the Ngargalulla came to them it was only a little while until the men died and went to LOOMURN, the home of their own dead people beyond the great "Wang-gal Koolarra" the western wind and sea, where they had lived their lives as "Kooj-ang-ooroo womba", sea coast men, from Yamminga time.