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LEGENDS

Many northern legends bear upon the initiation ceremonies, others are interwoven with the religious beliefs of the natives; others again bear upon the laws respecting food, its restrictions, the part assigned to each sex in collecting it.

The manner of relating their legends and myths is decidedly dramatic. Certain words are emphasised or repeated, accompanied with characteristic action of the hands, and movements of the whole body. When fairly started upon their recital, they deliver it with a good deal of dramatic force, accompanied with much pantomimic gesture, so that a stranger to their dialect, if familiar with their habits, can readily follow the course of the narrative from the actions of the narrator. When Joobaitch was describing a kangaroo hunt, his actions were quite as descriptive as his words, indeed more so, for during the recital he became absorbed in the reminiscences it evoked and fancied he was again engaged in the hunt, and the end of his recital was almost entirely pantomimic.

In some of the legends of the State the period is supposed to be the time when birds and beasts had possession of the earth, when without being mythically half beast, half human, they were yet possessed of human powers of speech, and used human weapons.

In other legends the time is held to be the period when these birds, etc, were human, and before their transformation into their present forms. To define either period in the native mind is impossible. With them every natural feature in any way pronounced has a mythical reason for its existence, and every peculiarity in bird or animal has a legendary origin, but these legends and myths are inexplicable by the natives themselves. In Yamminga times everything was possible, and from that period everything is accepted; with regard to Yamminga times there is no "why" in the native mind. The legends and traditions that have come down to him from his Yamminga ancestors are received by him with the same credence as the ancient scriptures are received by the enlightened and civilised world. To question him on matters and myths apparently contradictory, is not merely to confuse his mind, but also insensibly to influence it in favour of the theory of the questioner, whatever that theory may be. His myths and legends are indeed best left to his own rendering of them unbiassed by questions or suggestions, and it is thus the following legends have been collected, in the quiet of the native camp, taking time to choose the psychological moment when the narrator was in his or her best mood for their recital.

That entrancing moment when one finds one is included in the camp membership which ensures freedom of intercourse, unaffected recitals of ancient events, passing remarks on the significance of bird, animal or insect suddenly appearing in the vicinity of the camp, and all the daily happenings of native life! What student has not rejoiced over it, or would by a single question break into and possibly destroy this most desirable state of things, that he or she worked so hard to bring about?

Perhaps one is seated in a Broome camp and suddenly the windeegur or malloweeree (curlew) calls out, "Koorree bil bil, koorree bil bil," "Oh!" some jabbeolyoo (old man) says, "Thammunjoonoo (natives on a mission of revenge) coming kealgurdee or yalumban (south or south east)," or its cry may be interpreted "Wee'ow wid-wid-wid," "Thammunjoonoo coming bannogub," (east); or "Weeow kood'wid kood'wid" "Thammunjoonoo koolarrabul eebilnga (avenging natives coming from the west) "windeegur always tells when thammunjoonoo are coming," you are told, "and so always when the windeegur cries, womba must specially "look out." And so with other signs and tokens, each having its significance, trivia or important as the case may be.

Many of their myths and legends have a moral attached to them and some show a certain evenness of native justice in matters pertaining to food, etc. The old men - the upholders of the law which concedes so much to them - are not always being allowed to override the food laws as the northern legend here given shows :

Eaglehawk, Wagtail and Pigeon

TCHALLINGMER AND WANBERR

Roeburne
(Beejee, a Banaka)

The tchallingmer and wanberr (crane) had a fight. The crane has a mungoorl and the tchallingmer had joonga (fire) to fight with. The wanberr speared the tchallingmer in the hips and that's why tchallingmer waddles now; the tchallingmer hit the wanberr with the joonga and that is why the wanberr is the colour of kajoroo (ashes). The tchallingmer then sang :

Kanda ngarree ma' beelara,
Leave alone the spear,
kalanga bujjat narree.
Fight with a firestick.

The tchallingmer is the jalnga of the Boorong and Kaimera.

The jeejeejoooroo (plover) is the jalnga of the Banaka and Paljeri.

Lengo wallee - fish with red colour on throat (a species of fish)

Gidden gidden was also a womba and painted himself with doogul and goomberee.

To eat langara or neam wallee will bring great rain. (Broome)

Too clever doctors cannot live. Mooya mulgarguttuk - clever doctor.
(Capel)

noorgoolyet - brains

LEGENDS

The legends are handed down from father to son, that is, a Boorong father tells them to his Kaimera offspring, and they in turn relate them to their children. Similarly with Paljeri and Banaka fathers and sons, so that those legends which are only told to the males of the family will pass from father to son, and hence a Paljeri-Banaka series of "family legends" will differ from a Boorong-Kaimeraseries, and so on.

Certain birds, beasts and fishes which were supposed to have been men in Yamminga time are "sung" during certain stages in the initiation of young men. All these creatures were supposed to have been human beings, who have become changed into their present forms. Legends and myths connected with these transformations usually give the reason for any peculiarity in the bird, beast or fish. The pelican's bill is so shaped because it swallowed Lengo's koolmee lanjee; the emu's arms were cut off by the pigeon and that is why it cannot fly; the crane was hit with a firestick and that is why its legs are red; the mulguroorung (species of locust) was bitten in the middle by a snake and that is why it cannot come up again after it dies and goes into the ground, and why the womba cannot come up again like the snake. These changes or transformations did not occur through the agency of any supernatural being. Men changed themselves in Yamminga time, although recent ancestors are called Yamminga also.

At initiation time, hawks, kangaroos, kingfishers, fish, etc. etc. are sung by all taking part in the ceremony, whether any of these creatures may be their totems or not. Judging from the songs and the actions of those singing and performing at Weerrganjoo time, it would seem that it was endeavoured to keep alive the tradition that the ancestors of the people then taking part were at one time the birds, etc., they were now representing. While the swinging of the young men who fill the branches of the goonocroo tree continues, "bird" songs are sung by the elders.

"Darreeal daa, darreeal daa" (black cockatoo with red tail) and others/will be sung. ~~at the~~ Then after the songs are finished, the old men take their nowloos (clubs) and going to the tree, strike the trunk or any of the branches they can reach, "to bring the birds or 'fruit' down" - de'lee en'doo baa'loo (hitting the tree to make the birds come down.) and "Win'ya win'ya wanja baaloo" shaking the tree to knock the birds down - are some of the descriptions of the proceedings.

All the birds, etc. that are "sung" are totems, not necessarily of the young men in the tree, but of all those taking part in the ceremony and all are and have been, articles of food, except the blue pigeon which is never eaten, and some other birds forbidden to young men not fully initiated. The songs have descended from Yamminga time, and were composed by "yamminga" ancestors. The hawk song, which is sung both at wallawallong and weerrganjoo appears, like the kingfisher song, to have some special importance attached to it. The hawk may be a Class, hereditary or individual totem. The song is as follows :

Geerr'geerr maaloo injoonaa
Hawks not going.

Lindarararara

Wommulyooroo wan'ga injoonaa
Birds down going.

The coastal people have principally fish as their totems, yet all the assembled natives join in the bird, animal and fish songs at the initiation ceremonies, and no special group stands out from the rest in the performance of any special totemic ceremony.