

The West Kimberley system of belief is that in "yamma" time, all animals, birds, fish and insects were human beings. Yamma times are ancestral times.

Many legends and myths centre round the transformation of human ancestors into birds and animals, many of the legends giving the reason for certain peculiarities in the birds, beasts, fish, etc. into which they were transformed.

The pelican swallowed Lengo's lanjee (kailee or boomerang), and that is why its head and neck are shaped like a koolmee lanjee; the emu's arms were cut off by the pigeon, or burnt by its "wild cat" husband, and that is why it cannot fly; the crane was hit in the legs with the firestick, and that is why its legs are red; death came to the native because the carpet snake was jealous of the locust being able to come out of his skin the same as the snakes, which made the carpet snake hite him in two, so that only the snakes come alive again.

Certain insects, animals and birds are specialised in the legends as having inaugurated certain laws, obtained fire, made food laws and restrictions, destroyed plagues in the form of cannibal dogs, etc.

Many fish still retain the markings which adorned them when they were human. Gidden-gidden (parrot fish) was a womba in yamma time, and used to paint himself with doogul (red) and goom-beree (yellow). Loolooloo (whale) was also a womba and still retains the scars (moogurdai), which his brother-in-law had cut upon him.

When the womba changed into birds and animals, many of them "ate themselves". At some yamma period the natives believe that the great transformation took place, some womba being changed into birds (beerajoonoo), some into animals (wallee - game or flesh food), some into stone (koombara), and some into ngarree, ranjee, wardaba, etc.

Many of the legends have a moral attached to them, and show a certain evenness of native justice in matters pertaining to food, etc. The old men who are the upholders of their laws, and for



whose comfort and convenience they appear to have been inaugurated, are not always allowed to override them, as the following Broome district legend shows :-

EAGLEHAWK, WAGTAIL AND PIGEON



Their manner of relating their family legends and myths is decidedly dramatic. Certain words or phrases are emphasised or repeated, accompanied by characteristic actions of the hands or by movements of the whole body. When fairly started upon their recital, and with a congenial audience, they deliver it with much dramatic power and pantomimic gesture, so that a person ignorant of their dialect, if familiar with their habits as well as with those of the birds and animals whose mythical history they are graphically describing, will easily follow the course of the narrative from the actions of the narrator.

A Kaimera man transmits the legends and beliefs received from his Boorong father to his Boorong son, that Boorong again transmitting them to his Kaimera offspring. Thus one set of legends depicting the yamminga days, and the prowess of yamminga ancestors would be peculiar to the Kaimera-Boorong people (fathers and sons), while another set will pass from Banaka father to Paljeri son for ever. The renowned ancestors of each are Kaimera and Boorong or Banaka and Paljeri, according to the class of the narrator. A Banaka man does not repeat to his sons a legend of Kaimera or Boorong womba, his "heroes" being of his own or his son's class. A Banaka man has control over a Banaka beega ranjee on his own ground, and so on, although he will have heard of Kaimera and Boorong yamminga people who performed great deeds, or inaugurated special laws, etc., he will generally mention only the deeds that his own ancestors - who were Banaka or Paljeri - have performed.



## THE STORY OF THE MOON

(Boorong-Kaimera Legend)

Meerijal or Koonyooloo (moon) was a man in yammainga time, and he said, "Ngai inja." (I'm going.) He was talloor (fully initiated man). The womba said to him, "You go with that boy?" and he said, "No," and then they said, "You go with gambil? jallooroo?" Meerijal said, "No." "You go with bal'ellee?" they asked him. "No," he said, "they might make me minjil." (pubic tassel, emblem of circumcision)

Then they said, "Joo ngan'ga le'an," (you say what you would like), but Meerijal said nothing. He wanted to take a young girl away with him. The womba pointed to a big woman and said, "Do you want this one?" "No," he said, "she might look too much for bal'ngan'joonjoon (grubs)." They pointed to a young girl and said, "You like this one?" Meerijal laughed and said, "Yes," and he took the girl away with him.

They travelled westward, and when the girl stretched out her arm a lot of girls came, and when she stretched out her other arm a lot more came, and then she stretched out her legs and brought a great many more girls, and Meerijal put doogul on his forehead, and now he has a light(kalgal) that won't burn you, but walga the sun has got a fire. It is the sun's daughter who always comes up, for if the mother walga came up, the womba would be burned, so walga's daughter always keeps her mother down, and comes up in her place.



PART

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

The myths included in this section were gathered along the southern coast and southern portion of the Australian continent from Twilight Cove, in Western Australia, some hundreds of miles west of the head of the Great Australian Bight, and Ooldea in South Australia, a stopping place on the Trans-Australian railway. Many of them are of central Australian origin, for the informants were natives who had come south from the interior, many of them hundreds of miles from the neighbourhood of the Musgrave, Mann, Rawlinson and Tomkinson Ranges. They will, therefore, be grouped under a general heading of Central Australian myths.

Chapter I

STELLAR MYTHS

One often wonders if the route along which certain aboriginal myths and legends may be traced is an indication of the old route traversed by the progenitors of the tribes possessing these myths, in their journey from the northern point of entry to the various waters beside which they settled in the long ago. Aboriginal bondage to tradition still survives, and tribes, now far apart, whose very dialect has changed in the centuries, possess myths and legends whose similarity is evidence of tribal unity in some far-off time. Especially is this the case in the stellar myths of the aborigines. Our "Zodiac" is known to them as a "Dhoogocorr yuara", a winding road of the dream times, along which travel stars and constellations that were once men, birds, beasts and reptiles, metamorphosed into stars because they brought fire or water, victory, or some special benefit or relief to the tribe or group that translated them into heavenly bodies. Good and evil persons and creatures have been transformed into stars, but I have not yet found in any group a myth of the Deity or "All-Father" such as the Pundjil or Baiamai of eastern tradition.



The circumcised hordes who possessed almost two-thirds of the continent at the time of white settlement brought many quaint myths with them, or originated them during their journeys southward, eastward and westward, through the centuries. Sun, moon and stars figure in the legends of these circumcised people. Curiously enough, Jupiter and Venus, both males, are associated in a myth covering a large area of South and Western Australia, from Eucla towards the Mann and Petermann Ranges and from the Bight to a point almost to the Southern border of the Northern Territory. Near or far as these planets may be as they travel over their appointed track, they are Katta kudharra (heads two), having no bodies, but always following one another along the "dream road" which they themselves had made after their translation. One myth, with slight and unimportant variations, was obtained from the surviving members of the Willilambi (Twilight Cove) group, and also from some border area (S.A. - W.A.) groups, and others whose waters were west and north-west of the Central and Border Ranges.

The "Zodiac" of the aborigines was a winding sky road, traversed by the mythical creatures that roamed over the winding earth roads in the dhoogorr or dream times of long ago until their misdemeanours or their prowess or some notable action translated them into the constellations and stars of today.

The astronomy of the Aborigines is sui generis. Their sky animals no more resemble the real animals than the bear or the fish and goat of comparatively modern astronomy. Humans, animals, birds, clubs, spears, even the cliffs of the Great Australian Bight, are represented in Southern star groups. The Southern Cross was known throughout West Australia and Central Australia as the eaglehawk's foot, the pointers being the eaglehawk's club, but many stellar myths have a defined area. Altair in Aquila is known as Kaangga (the Crow) in North Central Australia. Delphinus are kaangga boys (crow boys) and Vega in Lyra is known as the Gibbera (wild turkey). The boys of a group whose totem was the gibbera were not allowed to look at Vega until after their initiation.



Stellar Myths gathered among Central Australian tribes follow.

### THE CONSTELLATION ORION

The constellation Orion is known to the Central Australian natives as Nyeeruna, a name which would seem to have some linguistic affinity with Orion. Nyeeruna is a hunter, but of women only, a baffled and humiliated hunter, kept for ever at bay by Kambugudha (the "V" in Taurus - bull's head), the elder sister of Yugarilya, the Pleiades, whom Nyeeruna is ever trying to capture and possess, but they are so well guarded by their elder sister that he has never been able to reach them.

Kambugudha always stands naked before him, feet and legs wide apart, her left foot (Aldebaran) filled with fire magic, which she threateningly lifts each time she sees Nyeeruna's right hand (Betelgeza) endeavouring to put red fire magic into his club, to hurl at her and so gain possession of her younger sisters. Kambugudha dares Nyeeruna with her whole body, and is so contemptuous of him and his vain personal display of feathered head dress and ochred body, string belt and whitened tassel that she has placed a line of puppies only between her and Nyeeruna (a faint waving line of stars between Orion and the "V" in Taurus.)

The puppies' fathers and mothers, all relations of Kambugudha, and her young sisters stand apart on roundabout tracks watching the game. The younger sisters (Pleiades) are very timid, and when they see Nyeeruna's body reddened with fire and lust (radiations from nebulae ?), fear comes upon them and they change into mingari (Molech horridus) while Nyeeruna's rage lasts; but Kambugudha never changes her defiant attitude and she, too, can emit fire from her body, so that the red fire of her anger and her magic is so strong that it can subdue the fire magic Nyeeruna throws out. When she advances towards him, lifting her left foot, she frightens him so greatly that the fire magic of his arm becomes faint and dies out for a while.



Again Nyeeruna's magic comes back in great force and brightness, and when Kambugudha sees the strong magic in arm and body, she calls to a father dingo (horn of the Bull) to come and humiliate Nyeeruna. The Dingo rushes over to Nyeeruna and shakes and swings him east and west by his middle and Kambugudha points at him and laughs, but her frightened little sisters hide their heads under their little mountain devil neck humps until the Dingo loosens his hold and returns to his place again.

A great part of the constellations and stars surrounding Orion form part of this great Central Australian myth. Procyon, Achernan, Taurus and others are all ready to help Kambugudha. They resent Nyeeruna's humiliating position and they laugh and are friendly with Kambugudha because of her care for her younger sisters.

Even Joerrjoerr (Canopus) the owled nightjar, though only an onlooker, laughs his Joerrjoerr laugh as he watches Kambugudha blazoning all her charms before the baffled Nyeeruna, daring him for ever. Kara the red back spider (Rigel) is also redly shining, ready to bite Nyeeruna. All the animals and birds round and about jeer loudly when they see Babba the Dingo debasing Nyeeruna's manhood. Beera (the moon) also mocks at him whenever he sits down beside Kambugudha and her young sisters during his journeys to the west, and Nyeeruna loses his red fire and no sparks come from his body (nebulae) in his shame and humiliation.

On fine, bright, starlit nights, the old men of the Central groups watch the game between Kambugudha and Nyeeruna; the little line of star puppies between them brightens and laughs, and Achernan (the mother dingo) standing at the end of her long row of puppies, joins in the laugh. The old men retell the old story, and wink at Beera whenever they see him sitting beside Kambugudha and her young sisters and leering and jeering at Nyeeruna's impotence.

Thus the myth has come down through the ages, but its special interest to ethnologists lies in its adaptation and readjustment to the real lives of the groups "owning" the myth.



It has been dramatised as a performance for men only, and is acted as a comedy or satire before every young initiate. The myth is first recited to them with many unpublishable details and every night during their novitiate the "play" is performed. They see the Nyeeruna actor trying to reach Kambugudha and her sisters and they watch Babba the dingo disgracing Nyeeruna's manhood before the sisters, and see him crawl away in shame and ignominy. No woman can see, or take part in, the performance, but within an enclosure, just about the distance away in which Nyeeruna and Kambugudha and her sisters "sit down" in the sky, a bush enclosure is made before the play begins and within this enclosure women and girls are hidden and raided at will by all the performers, including Nyeeruna. The women represent Kambugudha and her young sisters and the young novices are taught that they can raid young women at will when they have become men. Nyeeruna is shown throughout in the drama as a "shocking example" to all men.

During the performance, songs are sung by the groups owning the special myth, the songs being accompanied by the beating of short heavy clubs on a prepared sand mound (mankind's first drum). The drumbeating and singing are quick and loud or slow and soft as the drama proceeds, the frequent "raiding" of Kambugudha and her sisters being hailed with triumphant drumming and singing. This performance usually begins when the young boys are considered ready for initiation, and at a period when Nyeeruna is absent from the night sky, and it may last until Nyeeruna becomes visible again.

Night or day every native of the group owning the myth can point out the exact position of Nyeeruna and the other stars and constellations. The young initiates are thoroughly taught Nyeeruna's story which they must never reveal to women. The moral of the story is meticulously explained by the brothers or guardians of each young novice. The boys must look upon all women as their slaves, to do their will at all times and in all places, to "fetch and carry" for them throughout their lives.



A certain ruthless and savage power is thus instilled into the young novices as they fully grasp, through a wearisome reiteration, the acted story of the constellation, and see it turned topsy-turvy in meaning and application. When they realise their appalling power over all their womenkind and think of Kambugudha's successful defiance of Nyceeruna's advances, whatever cruelty is inherent in them is given full bent. The myth tells of the dominance of the female, and the drama's lesson for them is the dominance of the male.

The myth and performance (both grossly phallic) cover a wide area of Central Australia and the western border, south towards the Great Plain's northern edge and east and southeast towards the Diamantina, Cooper and other rivers. There is a religious instinct, though in a debased form, in this myth, as their only religious sentiments centre round phallicism. Totems, legends, initiation, all rites and ceremonies are representations of phallic worship.