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DISEASES

etc.

Central Australia



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They never "nursed" slight ailments and so not infrequently a neglected cold turned into consumption, and was not "treated" by the sorcerer until it had secured a fatal hold on its victim. Massaging magic, suction magic and every other kind of magic was then brought into play by the tribal sorcerer for hours and days, but there came a moment when the patient turned round on his earthen bed and quietly closed his eyes in death for death comes as gently and easily to the aborigine as it does to all creatures of the wild.

When pneumonia struck the camp in November, Inyiga, whose young frame was withering and rotting under the white man's curse - venereal - had no strength left to combat the urrgudharra (the C.A. term for lung or chest coughs) that caught her, and before the writer could take her in hand, she turned her face and body downward upon the earth and died. Inyiga with the others of the stricken group had come down from the Ranges in September 1920, a family group of 26, men, women and children, all perfectly healthy creatures - their well-nourished bodies gleaming innocently naked in the bright spring sun - all the women of the group had babies at breast or were heavily pregnant, but amongst them all Inyiga stood out by virtue of a specially joyous outlook. Unhappily she so readily adapted herself to the white man's ways and vices that within three months of her entry into civilisation she had begun the life of intense prostitution that ended in her early death in the winter of 1923.

There were eight very serious cases - five women and three men, Nyurdugulu, Gauadhugu, Jubandarri, Inudha and Karrerga, and Murna ambula, Balyari and Mundurr. Inudha, the wife of Balyari, an old bald-headed man, was so near death that she also had folded herself in three - chin and knees meeting, and feet and buttocks, and had buried her face in the ground. Kabbarli's voice roused her and she turned round and endeavoured to stretch herself to undergo the "magic healing".



There was the personal touch of Kabbarli, the cheering encouraging voice and manner, the sympathetic and instant response to the demand for local application to this or that limb or other member, massaging, grandmotherly cough mixtures, soft and suitable drink or light foods, oiling and kneading the weakened body and sending some little life into the worn young frame, and above all no washing and no disturbing movement of patient, all the disturbing and contortive movements being performed by Kabbarli who had much ado to avoid the small fires at either side of the patient, the larger fire in front of the small beehive-shaped hut, and to negotiate untorn branch and stem in the confined space of a four by six semicircular bough hut. Inudha responded as much to the manner as the method, and was quite "recalled to life" before Kabbarli left her for the next woman patient. Nyan-ngauera, Inyiga's "mother", was one of the pregnant women who came into civilisation on that memorable September morning of 1920. A strong-willed, sturdy woman, and the mother of several children, a grown-up initiated son amongst them, Nyan-ngauera early discovered that a baby handicapped excessive prostitution, and determined to kill and eat her baby as soon as it was born. She escaped from the writer, who had been feeding her almost to repletion for weeks, and abjuring her not to kill her baby. She was tracked for some 12 miles, but doubled on her tracks and gave birth to the baby within a mile of the camp and cooked and ate the body, sharing it with Ang'amba, the little girl next in years, who was given an arm and portion of the stomach of its little infant sister. Nyan-ngauera was sent to Coventry, the only possible punishment for this offence, but despite Coventry, she always claimed and received attention whenever she felt thoroughly ill. Pneumonia fastened heavily upon her for strong and sturdy though she was, her life of vice had begun to tell upon her, but she would not give in altogether to her illness. When Kabbarli reached her ngoera, she touched the various seats of pain - beega beolga, beega boolga (sick "big", very sick), she cried, almost in anger. Eager to get well enough



to resume her dreadful life so that her sons should have plenty of white man's food, she lent herself intelligently to every treatment and would have swallowed the whole of the cough mixture at once if by doing so she would hasten her recovery. She was one of the first to come down to Kabbarli's camp to demand food and yet more food, and as soon as she felt "cool inside", she vanished down the line to her special prostitution area where her sons were impatiently awaiting her.

Gauadhugu was wasted and feeble from the dread life of prostitution that she had led since 1921. Her little girl baby Binjawa was growing into such a merry child, yet always before its young eyes its own future fate was being shown to it by its mother. It took some patience and tact to bring Gauadhugu out of the fatalism that had settled upon her, and that would have brought her to death within a few hours. Her man Murna-ambula was also very ill. Inyiga had been one of his two wives and he was momentarily sorrowful over her death, and probably conscience-stricken over the many club beatings he had given her when she defied him for the sty delights of the low white. Murna-ambula's poor sunken eyes brightened when he saw Kabbarli coming towards him, and he proffered many requests. He wanted a head bandage, an oiled neck band, a wide warm (flannel) belt, porridge, milk, tea, sugar, medicine, etc. He greedily took every portion offered and though he sobbed and shook Kabbarli's hand in ceremonial sorrow for Inyiga's death, every cheerful word had its effect upon him, and after several days' continuous treatment, he and Gauadhugu were well enough to join some friends on a trip to Birdingga, some 60 miles south, to feed upon wombat, rabbit and iguana.

The friendly mixed mob they joined had come to Ooldea from Fowler's Bay, owing to the death of one of their young men, but Inyiga's death sent them wandering round the great Plain's edge, the only area ever which they may wander without fear of murder and cannibalism, With the exception of one or two old men, practically the whole Southern coast of Australia is now orphaned



country, the term applied to any portion of country whose owners are dead.

Jubandarri lost her husband Maradhamu, who experienced but seven months of civilisation before he passed out. He was induced by the mixed mob above mentioned - ex-mission men, ex-station hands, etc., to attend some ceremonies in the Kalgoorlie area early in 1921, and was brought back within a month in a dying state from active venereal. He died on the morning following his return to Ooldea. Jubandarri's widowhood was respected by the natives only, for early in 1923 she gave birth to a half caste baby boy, whose poor little body was covered at birth with a dark evil-smelling scale. I greatly feared that Jubandarri would kill the little creature, one of the only two half castes born at Ooldea Siding since I came here in 1919. Much work had to be done to cleanse and save the child and to induce the mother to rear it. She became in time somewhat attached to it. Both Jubandarri and the baby she caught the *urgudharra*, and were very ill indeed, but massage and medicine and the quaint but fattening food mixtures soon brought the young mother out of the valley of the shadow.

Nyurdugulu, who also killed her half caste baby by taking it away along the line and refusing to suckle it, and who lost her little full blooded boy about two years old at the same time, gave birth to another full-blooded girl baby in October 1923, and though the mother had pneumonia in a severe form, the baby escaped. Nyurdugulu's man was also down with the malady, and also old Balyari, one of the few baldheaded aborigines, who was so sure that he was going to die that he made a new *kaangga* (breakwind shelter of bushes) for himself and lay down within it to wait for the end, his poor wife *Inudha* lying helpless near by.

A little strenuous work with Balyari, some soft food suited to his years, castor oil and tea and porridge with milk and honey and olive oil in it, and other magic remedies - all these administered to a cheering accompaniment of *Coue-ism* or *Conan-Doyle-ism*, or whatever spiritual suggestion happened along at the moment,



caused old Balyari to feel that he still might become strong enough to make and sell karli (boomerangs) to railway passengers and render himself an eyesore by chewing ōgari (native tobacco) obtained by mysterious barter from allinjerra koggarrara (north east).

Karrerrga, the last of the women patients and the one woman amongst them who has kept her virginity through all these years, and who is beloved by Kabbarli in consequence, was with her husband and little girl child exceedingly ill. Neither Mundurr her man, nor Wilgidi, Mundurr's girl child, are quite normal, and Karrerrga appears to realize this and to treat them both as children with whom she must be infinitely patient and forbearing. Mundurr is very much her senior and is also the husband of Nyan ngauera.

All these people were active cannibals when they arrived at my camp in 1920, yet there is an affection between them that is unusual amongst the wild aborigine, man and wife and child, they are in a sense spiritually apart from the others of their group. Both her own women relatives and many low whites have tried to tempt Karrerrga to take up a life of prostitution, but the good soul keeps sweet and clean and virtuous. Karrerrga developed painful ear trouble after the pneumonia had been conquered, but this too yielded to simple treatment, and when all were on the high road to recovery the final touch was given by showing the women some beautiful jazzy material which their Kabbarli ngarngarli (doctor) had specially purchased for this moment, and which was to be made into frocks as soon as they were able to come to her camp to be fitted.

What cured them? was it the quaint cough mixture, the simple possets, the cheery optimistic diagnoses, or was it just some feeling connected with their medical attendant who waited upon them through the heat of the day and the darkness of night, whom they heard stumbling over log and root in the darkness as she made her toilsome way to their camp with sick comforts?



These poor creatures of the wild may not be conscious of respect and reverence and regard for the woman who "sits down" amongst them to serve them only, but the feeling surely is there, and one of their first convalescent journeys was in search of a bilyulyu ngannamurra ngogorn (fresh mallee hen's eggs) for Kabbarli, and they became well quickly, so that Kabbarli should not have the long journey about a mile from her to others.

Ringworm broke out in a few cases, the half caste baby being the first to develop it. Nyurdugulu had one which covered the whole of the back of her neck, infectious sores too showed up in the ankle, knee and elbow joints of some children and adults.

When, however, the pneumonia trouble was overcome, the other ailments were lightly scanned, and the true sign of convalescence appeared in the desire for a change to their own diet - ngannamurra, ngogorn, milbarli, rabbit, dingo and wombat. The ngannamurra ngogorn are more highly appreciated when they have fully or semi-developed chicks inside them than when they are bilyulu (fresh). Which reminds one of the Irishman who swallowed a raw egg, the chicken chirping as it passed down his throat. "Ah, me friend," he said, "Ye shpoke too late."

A curious and interesting study in psychology is the special development of the individual man or woman after they have come in contact with civilisation. They try to grasp the social system of the whites amongst whom they camp and endeavour to fit it in with their own system, and one of the first fruits of their inadequate knowledge of our social and marriage laws is the break down of their own family laws and restrictions. This is the chief reason why no group goes back to its own waters after it has come into contact with the whites, and it is also one of the causes of their rapid extinction. The little group that came to my camp in 1920 was a group of relations, each individual family distinct in itself and maintaining strictly the laws and avoidances which tradition imposed upon its members. Nothing of their old traditional laws is now left to this little group, and it is owing to the lack of an understanding Government system in dealing with



these wild aborigines that their quick demoralisation and consequent early extinction is in process of accomplishment.

Kabbarli obtained a most generous measure of meat for her convalescents from the Supply Train butcher for a very small outlay. The meat was to be cooked "human meat fashion". Bullocks legs were cooked in a sunk oven filled with hot ashes and the "carver" was given a cutting flint only to cut up and divide the meat. The sinews were first cut with the kandi (flint) and the portion of meat between each sinew was edged away from between the bone and sinew and passed in the lump to each recipient, an object lesson in human food cooking and dividing.

Tharnduriri and Kalba - kept away because of Nalbin's, Anajiri's and Bandala's prostitution.

Murna ambula and Gauadhugu watching them.

Ringworm developed in baby and mother.

Karrerrga - inflamed ear.

Then they found Milbarli, ngannamurra ngogorn, rabbits.

(From back of page - burdu thalling, very heavy).