

THE RISE OF A TOTEM

In the Nyitting (cold) times of long, long ago, when the once populous, but now extinct, Bibbulmun race lived and flourished in the fertile and well-watered areas of what is now Southwestern Australia, Balgarit came out of his maia and looked over the swelling slopes and grassy plains of his people, and in the near distance saw a herd of kangaroo romping and feeding on the green herbage. The kangaroo was the borung-gur (elder brother or totem) of his people, and was their principal meat food. He looked round his kalleep (home, or hearth) and saw his people still sleeping, for it was yet scarcely dawn.

Balgarit said, "I will hunt my meat along today," and picking up his spear and spearthrower (a good meat hunter carried but one spear when hunting large game) he walked quickly towards where his borung-gur (kangaroos) were feeding, taking advantage of a little rise or clump of low bushes until he approached near enough for his purpose.

Looking at the herd, he picked out the biggest male kangaroo, and then, standing in the open, waited an instant for the herd to see him and scatter. Then he followed swiftly on the track of the animal he had picked out for his meat.

Over the level valleys and gentle slopes the kangaroo fled with great strides, but Balgarit settled into a steady and swift stride also, and yonggur soon began to be frightened, and increased his leaps; but Balgarit went steadily on behind him. Balgarit wanted to perform a great feat, to be known among the great Bibbulmun people, hunting or running down large game singly. No Bibbulmun had ever killed large kangaroo meat in this way, and Balgarit, who loved his home and his home people, wanted greatly to see whether he could beat his kangaroo in staying power.

Which is a woman
Ngang-ga, the sun, came up and rose and rose as the day went on, but still the yonggur was leaping fast, and still Balgarit kept his steady pace, sometimes gaining as little obstructions

stopped yonggur, and sometimes losing in broken country which yonggur easily cleared, but never relaxing in speed. East and north and south yonggur fled, and east and north and south Balgarit followed him. Ngangga, the sun, watched them from her high road as she went across the sky to her night home in the west.

In the late afternoon yonggur began to leap uncertainly, and the watchful Balgarit said exulting, "He is growing tired," and when yonggur tried to drink from the waters they passed through or jumped over, Balgarit ran fiercely, flourishing his geej and neer (spear and spearthrower) and yonggur fled with increased fear.

Ngangga drew very close to her night home, while still the hunter chased his quarry, and by and by the sun went inside her maia, but Balgarit still ran after his daaj in the quick darkening twilight. He saw yonggur stagger in his stride, but still he ran and ran, and just before darkness came yonggur lay his full length on the ground, and Balgarit ran lightly up to him and speared him through the heart, drinking a little of his borunggur's blood to quench his hunger, for "blood is meat" and the blood of borunggur is lawful meat.

When he had killed yonggur, Balgarit cut off one of his paws, and moving over to a little cluster of bushes, he lay down, put the paw in front of him, and went to sleep. While he slept the jennuk yonggur (spirit of the kangaroo) who was the guardian spirit of all his human totem kin, came to him and saw the paw placed on guard, according to ancient Bibbulmun law, and left him quietly sleeping. In the dawn of the morning Balgarit woke, strengthened by his quiet sleep and by the blood of his borunggur which he had drunk. He rose to his feet and looked round him, and he saw close beside him a great stone jennuk (spirit or ghost) standing up with its club held over his shoulder. Balgarit looked at the jennuk with great fear and awe, and then he said, "Jennuk took care of me during the dark night when my eyes and my body were sleeping; now jennuk will be my borunggur (elder brother, totem) and my kooling and demman (children and grand-

children will be jennuk borunggur for ever. The Great Spirit Yonggur of my people put the stone jennuk beside me so that I should not be killed while I slept."

Balgarit's heart and pride were lifted as he thought and said these words, and he moved over towards a little hollow where rushes grew, and gathering some of these, he brought them and strewed them round the place where the stone jennuk stood, first clearing the ground of all leaves and twigs and making it level and smooth and clean. Then he said, "This place will be winnaitch (sacred) for ever, and when my people pass this way they must strew bushes round the jennuk who stood and guarded me, while I lay sleeping."

Then Balgarit got two waljup - the dried flower stem of the balga (blackboy) tree - into which Walja the eaglehawk had put fire in Nyitting yimes, and which were called waljup after him, and Balgarit made a little hole in one and a point on the other with the flint stuck in his meer, and twirling the point swiftly round in the hole where he had placed some shreds of the waljup, and some strands of his hair, he soon had a fire, and piling green woods upon it, according to Bibbulmun law and usage, a certain smoke shape went up in the early morning air, which he knew his people would be looking for. Then he sat down near his kill and waited with heart big and strong and light, for he knew he had done something that no other man had ever done, and his kooling and his demman and all his people would tell their children in the years to come that they must hunt singly as their greatgrandfather did in Nyitting times, and that their jennuk would take care of them when they were sleeping in the dark nights beside their kill, with the hand of their yonggur totem in front of them; and whenever they came to the sacred place where the stone jennuk stood they must clean the ground and strew fresh rushes upon it. If a yonggur borunggur and jennuk borunggur did not perform this service of propitiation on the winnaitch ground, blood would show upon the stone jennuk and the man would surely die, but if a hunted yonggur stepped on the sacred

ground he would be left unhurt, because he had run into sanctuary.

Kaiarit was the last yonggur and jennuk borunggur, and was an old man in 1910. His children and grandchildren were all castes. His old kalleep was covered with the wooden and stone homes of the new jennuk (spirits of the returned dead, the term being first applied to Flinders and his men when they visited the Southwest coast in 1803) and the sacred winnaitch place and the stone jennuk of Kaiarit's ancestors and all the old Bibbulmun laws and traditions which had been handed down and kept so faithfully by every true Bibbulmun, were neither known nor heeded nor spoken of except when Kaiarit and some old derelicts of other and friendly totems gathered together now and then to mourn for the old Bibbulmun days and ways.

The stone jennuk stood in the centre of the white man's paddock and his nanni and bulloki (sheep and cattle) trod the sacred ground, and the white jennuk stood on the winnaitch spot beside the stone image, but came to no hurt, for he was also jennuk.