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INTRODUCTION.

Scientists have placed the Australian Aborigine almost at the bottom of the scale of humanity. Their warrant is the poverty of his technical accomplishment and the level of his culture which is still just a rational degree above that of the animal. ~~He~~ <sup>He</sup> knows two seasons, winter and summer. He had no science of numbers, and can count to no more than three. After that comes two-two, (four), and in the south-west marra (hand) signified five - the rest is vague, "big mob," "plenty." He does not know the facts of birth. He knows the child's physical relationship to the woman, if the woman is his. If he has ~~not~~ been away from her for five or ten years, he may believe that all the children she has in the meantime are his own. He believes, and so does the woman, that if she sits near a certain rock, or tree, or if the moon, who is a man, looks and winks at her, whether she wants it or not, a baby will come out of the stone or tree or moon and become her own. If she is sitting beside a water-hole, and a mountain devil or bandicoot shows up suddenly, the baby she may be unconsciously carrying at the time will "belong to mountain devil or bandicoot."

The Aborigines began as communists, and they are dying out as communists, because in all the ages of their existence there has not arisen a man among them strong enough to raise them from the ruck of communism, which still prevails in every detail of their lives. If a man goes hunting, and comes back to camp heavily laden, his game must be divided amongst his stay-at-home fellows, who are all his group relations, even if his woman and his dingoes go hungry in consequence. No family stands out from the tribe by virtue or superiority. There are no arts and industries. No man is ever praised for excellence of workmanship in weapon or implement, for praise brings evil with it -- a curious belief that exists among the people of Southern Ireland to-day, who will praise neither man, woman, child, pig, horse or cow without the supplementary invocation "God bless it!" Although there were marriage laws, the communal state forbids exclusive ownership, and a man's tribal brothers may at any time ask or be given the loan of a woman, paying the price for the accommodation. Every man is a ~~tyrant~~ <sup>tyrant</sup> to his women, otherwise there is no superiority or inferiority among a people as landless and as leaderless as kangaroos.

There is no provision for the future, for until a man has got outside his food, he cannot call it his. That is why, when women go hunting, they take their fire-stick with them, so that they can cook an iguana or <sup>small animals</sup> ~~a vegetable~~ on the spot, and chance the beating for doing so. Give an old woman some food, and she will hide the greater part of it for the men in camp, and if it is insisted that she eat it all, will hesitate to come again. Give her an article of wearing apparel, and it goes the rounds of the camp until it is in rags. A famous scarlet opera cloak trimmed with white swansdown which I gave to a woman went on a tour through the whole of the South-west, always on a different wearer. On every station or farm where a native is given work to do, the owner has to feed every brother-communist who comes along. Stone images, peculiar markings on rock, tree or hill, are believed to be the images of offenders turned into stone because they kept their catch to themselves. Never a root was set to grow or a fruit tree protected.

There is no individual ownership, therefore, there is no progress.

Old men who have lost their hunting-pro<sup>w</sup>ness, with the cunning of the fox and magpie, make sorcerers of themselves by watching and smelling the naked hunters, are able to discover those who have killed and eaten. With spells and bone-pointing, their evil suggestion is fatal and so their living is easily gained.

At the great gatherings for the magic ceremonies in connection with the increase of meat and vegetable food, fear and fanaticism hold equal place in everyone's mind, and even in the dancing, the best dancer snatches a fearful joy in his movements, for he never knows whether his proficiency may give offence to the magic that will paralyse his limbs. A blind eye, or a wound that will not heal, a crippled child - all is magic. If a kangaroo goes bad, a hostile group or a sorcerer is accused of having poisoned the meat. Even a plenti<sup>t</sup>ude of food must never be kept, which is why an Australian, if he catches a kangaroo, will gorge and sleep, and gorge and sleep, until he has finished it.

The first uncircumcised tribes had no knowledge of circumcism and the initiation of their boys to manhood was mainly the reservation from them of certain foods which the elders desired them to hunt. The second hordes brought circumcism and sub-incision with them, and their culture spread because it not only lengthened the period of the novitiate, but gave them secret and ghastly blood-<sup>kites</sup> ~~bites~~ to keep the youths in

subjection for years. In all the circumcised communist groups of Australia, women and youths are tyrannised over to an incredible extent. There is no sense of justice or injustice. There is no sense of right or wrong. There is neither hope of heaven or fear of hell. There is only magic, and the evil spirit of aboriginal magic is powerless beyond death.

I have written the limitations, and now I can turn more happily to the expression of their idealism and imagery expressed in mythology and folklore. Many of their myths are rich in fancy and the manner of their telling comes near to poetry. Nearly every legend might begin with "in dhoogoor times", just as those of the western civilisation open with "once upon a time", for the dhoogoor" belongs to the dream time, and an age dimly emerging from the mists of the past. It was then that the earth was peopled by strange beings partaking of the nature of bird, animal, insect, or reptile, as well as of humans. Marvellous happenings befell these people during their sojourn on earth, and from them arose the natural features which still mark the landscape. Such people were the ancestors of the natives of today, each of whom is born into a totemic group associated with a mythical progenitor. The present day forms of these ancestors, kangaroos, opossums and so on, are the "elder brothers" of the natives of their totem, the relationship being characterised by strict tribal laws.

Nearly a life time has gone to the collection of the folklore and mythology contained in these pages. Their sources extend from the north-west of Western Australia to the coastal areas of the west coast <sup>of</sup> South Australia. Many of them were gathered on the Maamba Aboriginal Reserve <sup>near the Darling Ranges</sup> in Western Australia, still more at Ooldea, once an isolated oasis near the north-eastern rim of the illimitable Nullarbor Plain, now a stopping place on the East-West Railway Line. At Maamba, I heard from the lips of the last survivors of the once great Bibbulmun people who roamed the plains where Perth now stands, <sup>stories</sup> ~~the stories~~ which had been handed down from untold generations: at Ooldea there came to me whole, or in fragments, the legend and lore of the people who once wandered about the <sup>edge</sup> ~~head~~ of the Great Australian Bight, the beliefs and superstitions of the tribes, once secure in the isolation of the Mann, and Petermann Ranges in Central Australia, who are moving down to

civilisation, eager to tread the fatal path which has led their neighbours to destruction. Seated about a tiny camp fire, they narrated to "Kabbarli" their "grandmother", the legends, laws, ceremonies, myths and totems which they unconsciously absorbed as children and continued to absorb throughout their lives. Some of the myths have been pieced together over long intervals of time and distance, the beginning gathered at one camp, the end at another hundreds of miles away. Some have remained fragments, for the narrators who might <sup>have</sup> ~~be~~ unfolded them in full have passed on.

Many of the legends have a close resemblance to others heard in regions far distant, and the same principals, perhaps under other names, figure in myths which "belong" to widely separated tribes. That applies to an extent to the stellar myths, but more particularly to those relating to the great magic snake, or "woggal," which controls earth, fire and water, the lives, actions, totems and beliefs of the people. To the Bibbulmun he was a "woggal", to the tribes from Central Western Australia to Eucla, on the Bight, the "jeedarra", to those of the far north and north west the "tjoo'roo", and to those of the land which stretches over the Nullarbor Plains and far into Central Australia the "ganba"

A kindlier spirit-guidance is that of the "borungur", or "elder brother" to the Bibbulmun, the mystic kinship between man and animals and trees in a logical association of evolution and ancestor-worship, and for which, for want of a better one, I must resort to the American Indian word "totem". The spirit of the "totem" moves invisibly among its group, and if any of its laws are wilfully broken, it seeks the woggal, whose vengeance is swift and sometimes all-embracing. In their age-old ceremonies, the tribes sing the "increase" of the totem at the proper time, fight those who slight or mock or wantonly interfere with it, and propitiate the spirit. When a man dies, his totem mourns its human kin, and is not again eaten by the living while the memory of the dead remains fresh in their hearts. Children are taught the laws from earliest infancy, and dare not kill nor hurt the young of the "borungur" who are their own little brothers and sisters - a conception of humane-ness and love of God's small creatures as beautiful in its simplicity as the "Little Flowers of St. Francis".

The more deeply I went into the lives of these children of the wilds, the more their wonderland was opened for me to track to its beginning. As I pore over the disappearing pencilled words, I come upon many by-paths that I wanted to follow, but which I had to postpone indefinitely.

The wealth of fancy which lies in the aboriginal lore is as yet known to few. In the days to come when a national literature burgeons in the Commonwealth, native mythology should have a place akin to the tales and legends of other nations.