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***More Australian
Legendary Tales***

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Preface

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I must begin the preface to a new series of Australian Legendary Tales by thanking the press and public for the, to the collector, gratifying reception they gave the first one. There are many persons who have individually expressed their interest in my work so kindly that I would like to name them here and publicly thank them, but some of them are of such world-wide fame that to do so might seem a mere self-advertisement at their expense. Should this come under their notice, they will, I hope, understand my reticence, and accept my gratitude.

The present series of legends have all been collected by myself from the Blacks, as were the previous ones. But in this instance I had much help given to me by friends, who either told or sent me scraps of legends they themselves had seen or heard. On receiving any such I immediately made inquiries amongst the Blacks, and I was often enabled to complete the scraps, gaining through their hints a whole legend. For should the local tribes know nothing of what I wanted to hear, I would get them to make inquiries of wandering Blacks from other tribes whom they might meet during their periodic "walkabouts," or at corroborees they attended. I myself have had opportunities of knowing well members, of nine tribes, though that which I know best is the Euahlayi-speaking one, of which the Noongahburrahs are a branch.

As far as I know, only one of the legends in this series has previously been printed entire. This is one of my own

collecting from a Wiradjari black fellow, "The Crane and the Crow," and appeared in the *Sydney Bulletin*.

Some of the Blacks who have helped to build up this series belong to the Murrumbidgee, Darling, Barwon, Paroo, Warrego, Narran, Culgoa and Castlereagh rivers; the Braidwood, Yass, Narrabri, and other districts of New South Wales; to the Balonne, Maranoa, Condamine, Barcoo, Mulligan rivers, and the Gulf country in Queensland. But I have confined myself as far as possible to the Noongahburrah names, thinking it would create confusion if I used those of each dialect—several different names, for example, for one bird or beast. To such as were told in song I have tried to retain something of the rhythmical rendering. I have no doubt a skilled writer could have mosaicked these legendary scraps with flowery language into a beautiful work of art, but I have preferred to let the Blacks as far as possible tell their legends in their own way, only adding such explanations as seemed necessary to make them clear to the English reader.

I trust the fact that these legends belong to a stone age, an age when everything was rough hewn, will not be lost sight of by readers. Ever since I have been collecting folk-lore I have endeavoured to keep as many of the "coloured people" about me as I could in various capacities, even going the length that "Uncle Remus's" creator did, namely, of "at times sacrificing digestion to sentiment," the practical result of which has been that many scraps of folklore were revealed to me of which, but for this daily intercourse, I should probably never have heard. For instance, a young Bootha brought in the lamp one evening; seeing some big grey moths fluttering round it she said: "No good, Comebeegeeboon darngliealdah, no tomahawks here; you'll get burnt for nothing." Then I learnt

that the spirits send these grey moths as soon as it is dark to the camps to steal tomahawks for them. The bag-like back of their bodies is supposed to be the comebee (bag) they carry these in if they get them, but most often they are dazzled by the light of the fires, and blindly flutter into them, getting singed as they do round the lamp.

While walking through the bush after heavy rain, I came across some very brilliant fungi, growing on to dead trees. I picked off a piece, and on my return, going out to speak to some of the Blacks, I carried this fungus in my hand. A little black child, seeing its bright colour, came towards me as if to get it, but his mother quickly interposed, saying in an alarmed tone: "Don't let him touch it. It is way-way. Don't let him touch it." Then she told me that all fungi growing on trees were the bread of ghosts, and if a child touched any he would be spirited away by the ghosts. She said these fungi were luminous at night so that the ghosts could see them.

Walking through the bush, as I often do, with some of the Blacks, I hear many little scraps. Quite lately, while going along the edge of one of the plains we put up some spur-winged plover, who went off harshly screeching. I asked why the bird had that strange spur. Because, they said, a long time ago, a black fellow called Bahldurrahdurrah, as the plovers are now, had been noted for never going abroad without poison-tipped spears, from which even a scratch was fatal. When he died he was turned into a plover, and has his spears still, in the modified form of the spurs on the wings; he brings these forward if he wishes to injure anything, holding it between them, with fatal result.

On similar occasions I learnt that when the sun, as it sometimes does in summer, goes down like a fiery red ball, it

is the reflection of wattle gum on it that makes it so bright. After such a sunset, if they go out for gum, they are certain to find quantities; they say. The gum they melt in water, making it into a half liquid jelly which they eat with relish, and which they say has great strengthening properties. That when the moon looks very yellow after it has risen on a winter's evening, it is a sign of frost. "The Meamei have told Bahloo they will send frost to-night. He is going to keep himself warm; look at his bright fire," they say.

When they see a tree that usually grows on the plains on the ridges, or *vice versâ*, they say: "There are two who have married wrongly; that Coolabah must have run away from her tribe with a Bibbil. And now the wirreenuns, or wizards, have turned them into trees."

I often come in contact with instances of their deeply ingrained superstitions. One morning a very fine healthy specimen of a young native woman was scrubbing the verandahs. As I passed her, she said, "I might die soon, Innerah." (They call me Innerah in the sense of boss-woman.) On inquiry I found some young man whom she had declined to marry had stolen a lock of her hair, and was now making his way with it to the wirreenuns of the Boogahroo. Should he reach them and they agree to burn it, she would die. There was some hope for her, she said; her totem clan, the Beeweas, were very strong out that way, and, having been warned, might intercept him. Should he succeed in causing her death, so long as any of her tribe were alive they would be at enmity with his, and the feud would go on from generation to generation.

Another day a girl came to borrow a horse to go down the river to see her sister, whose baby, a messenger had just

come to tell her, was dead. She went, and on her return I asked if the baby were buried. She told me the wirreenuns had put its breath back in it and it was alive again. On my doubting that it had been really dead, she brought two or three witnesses to corroborate her story, and they described how the two wirreenuns had caught the breath just after it left the body, put it back through the child's mouth, and then set to work to suck the sickness out of the body, with the result that the baby recovered.

It was in the summer of 1896, when the six weeks of a heat wave caused so many deaths in this district from heat apoplexy, that the Blacks first saw Marmbeyah, the ghost with the green boondee, about here. The next summer I said one day to a black woman that I hoped we should not hear of so many deaths that season. "Oh no," she said, "there won't be any this year because a black fellow has killed Marmbeyah, who caused the deaths by knocking the people on the back of their necks with his green boondee." The black fellow is supposed to have seen this evil-dealing ghost in front of him one day, he himself being unobserved, when he stole up and flattened him with his boondee, thus saving his people and the whites from further sickness of the heat apoplexy kind. We have in the camp an old woman who is supposed to call up spirits—and they do come. She gave us a test of her power one day, which I am bound to say compared favourably with any séances of a like nature I had seen before, inasmuch as she held hers in the light of day. She never drinks hot tea nor any sort of liquid which would heat her internally; did she do so she says the spirits would be driven out and she be powerless as a medium of communication with them; it is, she says, because the black people drink the "grog" of the white

people they are losing their ancient power; in the past they never drank any hot liquid.

It was the same old woman who accurately foretold the breaking up of a drought. The oldest woman of this tribe having died, was buried the next day. The Blacks told me I could go to the funeral, and on the way the old spiritualist walked beside me. Seeing the droughty desolation of the country, I asked her when she thought it would rain again. Coming very close to me, she half whispered, "In three days I think it; old Beemunny tell me when she dying that s'posing she can send 'im rain, she sent 'im three day, where her yowee go long a Oobi Oobi." Beemunny died on Wednesday night, and we went to bed on Saturday with the skies as cloudless as they had been for weeks; in the middle of the night we were awakened by the patter of raindrops on the iron roof. All night it rained and all the next day.

Since my first series came out I have heard some items which more fitly complete four of the legends in it, which completions I now add. To "Mullyangah the Morning Star" might be added that under the tree in which Mullyan's gahreemay or camp was, the spring of water which was there then is still so, and from time to time it throws up various sorts of mammoth and strange bones belonging to a past age, which the Blacks say are the remains of Mullyan's many victims, whose bones were dropped from the tree into this spring, called Guddee, which is in the Brewarrina district.

To "The Galah and Oolah the Lizard," some Blacks add that the present colouring of the bird, grey and rose-pink, is owing to her having rolled in the dust as the blood streamed down both sides of her head from the wound the bubberah, thrown by Oolah, had made, staining for ever her breast and

underpart of her wings, the dust toning the blood-red down to rose-pink.

It is to the legend of "Mooregoo the Mopoke, and Bahloo the Moon," that we owe a black fellow's reason for a halo round the moon. Ever since the storm in that legend when Bahloo built himself a dardurr, he has done so before rain. Seeing a halo the Blacks say, "Bahloo has built his dardurr, there will be rain."

To "Deereeree the Wagtail and the Rainbow" they add that Bibbee, who made the Euloowirree or rainbow, put snakes at its end to guard it, and if any one goes near it, these savage flat-headed snakes will kill them.

The former series were all such legends as are told to the black piccaninnies; among the present are some they would not be allowed to hear, touching as they do on sacred subjects, taboo to the young.

The Legend of Nar-oong-owie, the Sacred Island, was not heard directly by myself from the Blacks, but was first told to me, when a child, by my grandmother, and was sent recently to me by my uncle in much the same form, having been told to him by a full-blooded aboriginal of Southern South Australia.

To the legend of "Dinewan the Emu, and Whan the Crows," some natives add that when Dinewan's wives (the crows) threw the hot coals over him his wings were burnt off, and that singed appearance which has been theirs ever since given to the feathers where the stumps of the wings are.

K. Langloh Parker
Bangate, Narran River,
New South Wales,
September 1898.

