

NYEERRGOO GABBI

11A.

In Nyitting time there was at Nyeerrgoo a spring which was at the end of a sloping cave or tunnel and any kalleepgur who went to fetch water from this spring had to take off their bwokka (kangaroo skin cloaks) and every ornament on their bodies and leave those some distance from the opening and go into the cave absolutely naked. Then when they had reached the spot where the spring was they had to pick up a stone and strike the water with it and as soon as they struck the water it rose up and rose up and the water bringers dipped the vessel in the rising water and filled it as they ran back to the entrance. If the water overtook them as they ran, they would die.

Two dwerda (dogs) were guardians of this cave water and they watched to see that those who went into the cave obeyed the injunction laid upon them and entered the cave quite naked and without ornament of bone or string or teeth or shell.

One day some moorurt (relations) of the Nyeerrgoo yungar came on a visit and went out hunting with the kalleepgur. They caught many kangaroos and many other game and on their return to camp, one of the young men who was very hot and thirsty ran in to the spring without taking off his string belt, although he knew of the injunction, but in his thirst he paid no heed to it. He drank of the water and went to his fire which was in the bachelor portion of the camp, for in all camps the young bachelors must keep apart from the married people and have their own fire and shelter.

He sat down and waited for the food that would be sent to him from those to whom he had given the game he had caught, and by and by when he had eaten he lay down to sleep. Presently he heard two dogs howling and he sat up and said to the young man who lay on the other side of the fire, "What are those dogs howling for?" "I don't hear any dogs," said his friend. "Two dogs are howling quite close, where are they?"

Then the other young man knew that the janga dwerda were boogur (angry) with him for disobeying the injunction laid upon them, and that it was not real dogs which he heard howling, but the janga



dwerda of Nyeerrgoo.

The young man called to the dogs, "Stop howling, stop howling," but they howled unceasingly and the young man became hot and dry and weak. He moved away from where he had made his fire and went to the end of the row where the young men slept with a fire between each one. There he lighted his fire and sat down but the dogs howled again close in his ear and he was frightened and jumped up and ran away but though he could not see the dogs, their howls always followed him wherever he went. All the night and all the next day and the next, their sharp howls smote his ear, and when the third sun had come the young man was dead, for that was how the dogs punished those who did not follow the injunction, they howled and howled until the yungar died. The dwerda cannot bark like a white man's dog, they can only howl.

When white settlement came to Western Australia, Bishop Salvado instituted a Roman Catholic Mission for the Aborigines of the Nyeerrgoo district, which he called New Norcia and once in the early days of his mission when he had been hunting with the natives they came near Nyeerrgoo Gabbi. All were thirsty and wanted water. The bishop said, "There is water, go and get it." "No," they said, "we fear to go there." "Well, why should I not fear too?" said the Bishop. "Nothing will hurt you," said they, "you are janga (spirit - "white man")." "Very well," said the Bishop, "I will go," and he took a conch shell from one of them and went towards the water. The natives followed him in single file, but did not enter the place with him. When he came out, he gave them all to drink and turned away from the water towards the mission. Now instead of walking in single file behind him they walked in front of him so that should the dwerda become angry, they would punish the Bishop who had gone to the spring without taking off his clothing.

If when going through the tunnel the bwokka burt yungar (naked native) accidentally touched the sides of the cave at the end of which the water lay, he immediately called out in a quick, sharp tone, like a dwerda, "Kel-ya! kel-ya! kel-ya!" and the dwerda hearing did not harm him, but if anyone deliberately touched the sides of the tunnel, they died.