

HOW FIRE FIRST CAME TO THE BIBBULMUN

In the Nyitting or "cold" times of long ago there lived among the hills and along the rivers and beside the sea in the South-West of Western Australia a great many groups of Bibbulmun. There were emu Bibbulmun, kangaroo Bibbulmun, mallee hen Bibbulmun, and many others, for in the long ago Nyitting times all the animals and birds and fish and reptiles were yungar (men) and "walked about" and hunted and fished and made little huts (maia) to shelter them when the cold waters came down from the sky. But they were always cold and shivering for they had no fire to warm them or to cook their food which they had to eat raw.

Kweenda the Bandicoot who lived east of the Bibbulmun country had fire, but he was a cunning fellow and greedy and kept it to himself and would not let the other yungar have any of his fire and when he went out hunting he carried the fire under his tail, but when the Bibbulmun went to him and said, "Give us some of your fire," he would say, "I have no kala," but they could see the kala shining under his munda (tail) and they were angry with him because he kept the fire to himself, and would not give them some to warm them and cook their meat which they continued to eat durdongin (raw.)

Now Kwidderuk or Gallup the Sparrowhawk and Wata the Pigeon who were demmangur ("cousins") were very sorry that their Bibbulmun friends and relations had no fire and they talked by themselves in their maia and said, "We must get fire from Kweenda and give it to our moorurtung (relations.) We will go and see him and ask him to give us some of his fire."

They went to Kweenda's maia and as soon as he saw them coming he hid the fire with his tail and began to clean his beard. He had been eating some nice cooked meat and Kwidderuk and Wata were very angry, for his meat smelled so good, while the raw meat of their moorurting smelt werra (no good.)

They came and sat down beside Kweenda and asked him for some kala. "I have no kala," he said, but they could see the kala burning under his nunda. They went away a short distance and Kwidderuk said, "We will not ask him again, but we will take his kala from him because of his greediness."

So they sat down to watch Kweenda and one day they saw him sitting with the fire on his back - bookala-kal-nyin (on his back the fire was sitting) and the smoke rose from the fire and Kweenda was happy because no one else had fire but himself. While he was sitting and laughing, Kwidderuk and Wata came quickly and sat down beside him, one on each side. They did not speak to him, but they pressed him and pushed him this side and that side, north and south and west, until at last they came to the sea.

Now Waddarn the sea was Kweenda's kong-ga (uncle) and when they had pushed him close to Waddarn, Kweenda called out loud, "Kong-ga, kong-ga, nganya kal burrong, kal burrong," (Uncle, uncle, take my fire, take my fire,) and when they pushed him still further, he threw his fire to Waddarn, but a little spark fell on Wata's beard and Wata held it close and close and Kwidderuk bo-muming (blew gently with his mouth) until a little smoke came from Wata's beard and then they knew that they had got the fire. And they took it away to the Bibbulmun country and put it in the trees, a little in this tree, more in that tree, until every tree had some fire in it, so that the Bibbulmun could get fire from every tree.

Wata put two fires in the Kwela (sheoaks) and Mungaitch (honey bearing banksia) and Moodurt (jamwood) and Balga (blackboy) and other trees, but only one in Jerrail and Marra (mahogany) so that some trees burn very well and leave good ashes that can be rubbed on children's bodies and can make spear wounds clean and well and other trees leave only charcoal and burn very slowly.

As soon as the Bibbulmun saw the fires burning in all the trees and the smoke going high, high up, they were gwabba gwabba (ver, very gaad) and they ran along towards the fires, dancing

and singing,

"Demmanung kal jinnung, kal jinnung, kal jinnung."
(Our cousins have got the fire, see the fire, see the fire.)

Walja the great eaglehawk was sitting on top of a tree fast asleep when the glad song of the Bibbulmun waked him. He listened to the singing with his eyes half-closed and then he called out, "Injee, injal, kal injee," (Where is the fire, where?) but nobody heeded him. Then he opened his eyes wide and saw the smoke. "Al-le marr, kala yooat, marr woordut." (That's a cloud, that's not fire, a cloud only, my brothers.) But the Bibbulmun only sang more loudly and gladly, "See, our cousins have brought us the fire, see the fire, see the fire."

Then Walja shook himself and stood high up and looked round and saw big fires coming from balga and mungaitch and all the other trees and he said to himself, "I will tell them that I brought the fire, and not Kwidderuk and Wata." So he called aloud to the singing Bibbulmun, "Listen, you can always have fire now and you must get it from the balga, for I, Walja, your kong-ga (uncle) will make the fire come quickly for the old people from the balga and you must call the stems "waljap" after my name. Then Walja showed the Bibbulmun how to make fire by turning the waljap round and round in a little hole made in a nother piece of balga.

The Bibbulmun now had their fire and cooked their meat on it and were never more cold in Nyitting time, for they could always carry lighted sticks of mungaitch or balga or moodurt when they went hunging or travelling and these firesticks never diedout until the last little bit had burned to ashes. Bibbulmun women rubbed their babies with mungaitch ashes and men cleaned their wounds with it, and although Walja the eaglehawk claimed the fire as his, the Bibbulmun knew that their demmangur Kwidderuk and Wata had got the fire and they made a song and dance for their demmangur in Nyitting times, which were performed until jangga (spirits, white people) came and took all the Bibbulmun country and waters and fire trees and left the Bibbulmun no place to live in and no country to hunt over and no dancing ground where they could sing their songs of remembrance to Kwidderuk and Wata who

had brought them the beautiful fire and the jangga kept coming in great numbers and pressed them and pushed them this side and that side, north and south and to the sea's edge just as Kwidderuk and Wata had pressed the Kweenda when they took his fire, and the Bibbulmun died and went down into the Waddarn's bosom, and passing through the great weir that lay half way between their country and Kurannup, the home of all the dead Bibbulmun, they joined Kwidderuk and Wata, Waija and Wej and all their dem-mangur and moorurtung who had gone before them to that faraway home of the dead called Kurannup.