

ELEANOR DARK

# The Timeless Land



Collins

FONTANA BOOKS

## PREFACE

This book has borrowed so much from history that it seems advisable to remind readers that it is fiction. My aim has been to give a picture of the first settlement of Sydney, which is always true in broad outline, and often in detail, but I make no claim to strict historical accuracy either in my dealings with the white men or the black. With regard to the latter, strict accuracy would be hardly possible. There are many accounts of these people in the journals of those who came to Australia with the First Fleet; but as was inevitable between races unacquainted with each other's customs, there were constant misunderstandings, and in the light of research which has been made in more recent years, one is bound to regard some of their statements with suspicion. That they recorded faithfully what they saw cannot be questioned; that they placed the correct interpretation upon it is not so certain. The aborigines, too, have a strongly developed sense of humour, and one cannot help suspecting that the early colonists had their legs frequently and diligently pulled.

Of the tribes which lived on the shores of Port Jackson at the time of the white men's arrival, less is known than of almost any other tribes, for the obvious reason that, being the first to mingle with the invaders, they were the first to disintegrate, and die out. Therefore, where I have wanted to introduce songs, words, legends, customs, for which I have been able to find no record for these particular groups, I have borrowed shamelessly from other tribes, often far distant. The result, from an ethnologist's point of view, must be quite horrible; but I am not really very repentant. These people were all of one race, and it is the quality of the race which I have tried to suggest, without regard to minor tribal differences. The important thing has seemed

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My main sources of information have been the published journals of members of the First Fleet, and the historical records of N.S.W. For my descriptions of aboriginal life and customs I have found material in the works of Professor A. P. Elkin, Dr Phyllis Kaberry, Dame Mary Gilmore, Dr Herbert Basedow, Mrs Daisy Bates, C.B.E., and others. My grateful acknowledgments are also due to the Trustees of the Mitchell Library, Sydney, for permission to quote from the journal of Lieut. Ralph Clark, and from a letter of the Rev. Richard Johnson.

to me to be that these were the *kind* of songs they sang, the *kind* of legends they loved, the *kind* of customs and beliefs by which they ordered their lives.

A great deal of research has been done among them, and many books have been written to describe their way of life. What I have read has only served to make me increasingly conscious of my abysmal ignorance, and I must emphatically insist that my portrayal is not intended to be taken too literally. Many intensely important aspects of tribal life have been touched upon lightly, or left out altogether. The question of native 'religion,' in particular, has been here enormously over-simplified; to treat it fully (even if I felt myself qualified to do so) would have left no room in the book for anything else. The belief in the existence of a Supreme Being is vouched for by many authorities, as is also the belief that after death the spirit passes to the sky—but these are mere fragments of a huge and complicated structure of spiritual belief, embracing the mythology which is, in a sense, the history-book of the aborigine, keeping him in touch with the 'eternal dream-time,' the unseen world from which he came, and to which he hopes to return.

Certain mistakes made by the colonists when they were first learning the meanings of aboriginal words have been ignored, as they would only be confusing here. In some cases I have deliberately used an incorrect word simply because it has become the familiar one—as, for instance, 'birrahlee,' and 'kangaroo.' Kangaroo was a word quite unknown to the Port Jackson natives, being one which Captain Cook had learned from the Queensland tribes, and they naturally assumed it was a white man's word. Indeed, Tench records that one of them, upon first seeing cattle, inquired whether these were kangaroos?

The beautiful lament which I have borrowed for the occasion of Barangaroo's death belongs by right, I believe, to a Western Australian tribe.

Among the native characters many are historical, Bennilong being, of course, the best known of them; the eastern point of Sydney Cove, upon which Governor Phillip built him his hut in 1790, is still called Bennilong Point. It will be obvious that my account of his life before the arrival of the First Fleet must be purely imaginary; after its arrival I have stuck

to facts, but interpreted them freely. Booron, Nanbarree, Colbee, Caruey, Arabanoo, Barangaroo, Ballederry, Gooroo-barooboolo, and several others are historical figures. Tirra-wuul, Wunbula, and Cunnemillee are imaginary.

The Australian Aboriginal had great virtues; in a fairly extensive reading I have been able to discover no vices save those which they learned from the white invaders of their land. Some of their customs seemed cruel to us. Some of ours, such as flogging, horrified them. The race is nearly gone, and with it will go something which the 'civilised' world has scorned too easily. I do not want to be taken for a 'back-to-nature' advocate, nor for one who, in these disillusioned times, regards our own civilisation as inevitably doomed; but I do believe that we, nine-tenths of whose 'progress' has been a mere elaboration and improvement of the technique, as opposed to the art of living, might have learned much from a people who, whatever they may have lacked in technique, had developed that art to a very high degree. 'Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'—to us a wistful phrase, describing a far-away goal—sums up what was, to them, a taken-for-granted condition of their existence.

With regard to the white men and their doings there has been little need to embroider. The difficulty has been, rather, to chose and eliminate from the *embarras de richesse* which is available in the early records of the colony. The characters of many of the officers are to be discovered between the lines of their journals and letters; I have tried to portray them as I found them there, realising that another student of those same documents might find quite different men. It is not easy to catch more than a glimpse here and there of Arthur Phillip the man in the voluminous dispatches and correspondence of Arthur Phillip the Governor. The comments of his contemporaries shed a little light—his actions and the results of his actions more still. Certain qualities appear too obviously to be questioned—physical courage and endurance, moral fortitude, a struggling humanitarianism, and a streak of illogical faith. Upon these qualities I have built what must be regarded merely as my own conception of the founder of Australia.

Where letters have been used they are quotations from genuine documents. The Prentice family and the Mannion



family are entirely imaginary.

ELEANOR DARK.

Katoomba,

July 29th, 1940

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GLOSSARY  
OF ABORIGINAL WORDS  
AND PHRASES

<i>Bado</i>	Water.
<i>Be-anga</i>	Father; also leader or responsible person.
<i>Bereewolgal</i>	Name given by the natives to the white men. Lit. 'men come from afar.'
<i>Ben-ga-dee</i>	Ornament.
<i>Bee-all</i>	No.
<i>Berai-Berai</i>	Orion.
<i>Biningung bado</i>	Give me some water.
<i>Birrahlee</i>	Child.
<i>Birrong</i>	Star.
<i>Bo-ee</i>	Dead.
<i>Boodjerree</i>	Good.
<i>Bulla murrat dyin</i>	Two big women.
<i>Burul winungai lun miamiai</i>	Much desirous of young women.
<i>Cardalung</i>	Hot.
<i>Coo-eel</i>	Come here! Come to me!
<i>Coolamon</i>	Wooden vessel for drinking, or for carrying food or water.
<i>Corroboree</i>	A dramatic dance, performed with appropriate words.
<i>Duggeri-gai</i>	White men.
<i>Dulka</i>	The sky.
<i>Dyin</i>	Woman.
<i>Eka-beeral</i>	Exclamation of wonder or astonishment.

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<i>Towri</i>	Tribal territory.
<i>Unjerunbi minkai?</i>	What do you want?
<i>Waiia koa bag; mimai yikora!</i>	I must go; do not detain me!
<i>Waw . . . ?</i>	Where is . . . ?
<i>Weerce</i>	Bad, or wrong.
<i>Werowey</i>	Girl.
<i>Whurra, whuttai!</i>	Begone, begone!
<i>Wi! Wi!</i>	Exclamation of aversion.
<i>Wirri</i>	The sun.
<i>Wongerra</i>	Boy.
<i>Wommerah</i>	Throwing stick for spear; also used for other purposes as implement.
<i>Woram-woram buna; worambil motum</i>	Go to sleep, sleepy little one.
<i>Wuttai?</i>	Where to?
<i>Yagoona</i>	To-day.
<i>Yapallun!</i>	Alas!
<i>Yen-ou?</i>	Shall I go?
<i>Yowara-gurrugin</i>	Maker of corroboree songs.
<i>Yuroo</i>	Hungry.
<i>'Dinga dinga burula, Murringa dibural'</i>	'Plenty of wild dogs, The black men are spearing them!'
<i>'Burran, burin, bilar bundi,</i>	'Shield of buree, spear and club,
<i>Murala berar karni'</i>	Throwing stick of berar bring!'

<i>Gan-to bon bunkulla teti kulwun?</i>	Who killed him?
<i>Gan-umba roa unni yinal?</i>	Whose son is this?
<i>Gatoa bon tura</i>	It is I who speared him.
<i>Goorobera</i>	Musket. Lit. 'stick of fire.'
<i>Gourgour gahgah</i>	The Kookaburra.
<i>Guiod!</i>	Good-bye!
<i>Gwee-un</i>	Fire.
<i>Kabo bag kaun England-ka</i>	Soon I shall be at England.
<i>Kai kai karakai!</i>	Come, make haste!
<i>Kamai</i>	A spear.
<i>Keawaran wal bi uwa-nun!</i>	You shall not go!
<i>Kia?</i>	What do you say?
<i>Kuji</i>	The bee.
<i>Kurru</i>	Clouds.
<i>Kuurang</i>	The tiger snake.
<i>Magra</i>	Fish.
<i>Mia-mia</i>	A bark shelter.
<i>Mirrabooka</i>	The Southern Cross.
<i>Morungle</i>	Thunder.
<i>Moo-la-ly</i>	Ill, indisposed.
<i>Murrai</i>	Big.
<i>Murruwulung</i>	The men.
<i>Naa-moro</i>	Small.
<i>Na-lau-ra</i>	Compass. Lit. 'to see the way.'
<i>N'gal</i>	Sit down, as a guest.
<i>N'gai-ri!</i>	Here!
<i>N'gai n'gai pindwagung bado</i>	Bring it here!
<i>Ngindigindœer</i>	I will bring you some water.
<i>Nowee</i>	Venus. Lit. 'you are laughing.'
<i>Parrebuga</i>	Boat.
<i>Teeri-yeetch beem</i>	To-morrow.
<i>Thirringunna</i>	Red-headed one.
	Hide-and-seek. Lit. 'where are we?'



Bennilong and his father had come down to the cliffs again, alone. It was quite a long way from the place where the tribe was camped, and they had set out early in the morning when the heat of the midsummer day was only a threat, and the spider-webs across their path were still glimmering with dew. Now it was after noon, and though Bennilong was six, and expected to bear himself like a man, he was tired and sleepy and a little cross, and he sat in the shade of a rock with his copper-coloured legs thrust out in front of him, and his fingers idly making curly marks in the thin, hot sand. His head was bent, his lower lip protruded, his dark, liquid eyes were sulky. And yet, although this sleepiness, this crossness lay upon his spirit like a weight, he had a sense, too, of a larger contentment which included it, and made it trivial. He was conscious of the world, and conscious of himself as a part of it, fitting into it, belonging to it, drawing strength and joy and existence from it, like a bee in the frothing yellow opulence of the wattle. He was conscious of an order which had never failed him, of an environment which had never startled or betrayed him, of noises such as the chorus of the cicadas, less a sound than a vibration on his ear-drums, of scents which he had drawn into his nostrils with his first breath, and of the familiar, scratchy touch against his bare skin of sand and twig, pebble and armoured leaf. So that his sulkiness remained isolated in a mind abandoned to sensation—something which, for the present, would go no farther than the out-thrust lip and the liquid darkness of the eye, while he absorbed, in absent-minded voluptuousness, his secure and all-sufficient world.

The sky was very blue; there was not a cloud in it. The sea joined it in a silver line, incredibly far away, and there was the noise of surf breaking on the rocks at the foot of

the cliff. But these were not things to be thought about, or even to be noticed very much. They were so, they were eternal, unquestionable, like the tribe, like the moon, like Gnambuootchaly the evil spirit. An ant dragging a dead fly laboured tremendously, backward, up the smooth, overhanging curve of Bennilong's leg. He watched it solemnly, finding that by contracting his muscles he could impede its progress; and then suddenly he became aware that it tickled him, and killed it fiercely with a blow of his palm. The smell of it, hot and pungent, reached his nostrils, and he held his hand before his nose, sniffing, until he decided that he did not like it, and the small flicker of sensuous revulsion released his mood, and filled him with the formless resentment of over-wearied childhood. A tear overflowed and slid down his cheek. He knew that if his mother had been there she would have understood that he was tired. She would have gathered him against her breast, scolding and soothing him with familiar words. 'Woram-woram buna,' she would have said, 'worambil moium.' But his father did not notice.

Bennilong, from beneath his lashes, stole an upward glance at the motionless figure standing upon the rock in whose shade he rested, looking at the long, tireless legs, the broad chest, the upflung head with its matted hair and beard, the muscles standing out along the arm which held the shield and spear; and for a moment his gaze was held and his eyes dried, studying the grace and the strength and the pride of a man who had never known physical or spiritual humiliation.

Wunbula stood quite still. A darkly shining silhouette against the blue sky, nothing moved but his hair and his beard, blowing in the sharp sea-wind. The light struck downward on to his forehead and his cheek-bones making them gleam softly like unpolished bronze, and his eyes, narrowed to slits in the dark caverns beneath his brows, gazed out over the glare of the ocean, searching the horizon. Thus reminded of the object of their journey, Bennilong's gusty sense of grievance faded once again before more absorbing thoughts. His father had not noticed that he was tired. His father had forgotten him. His father was watching for the boat with wings.

For long ago—a whole season ago, when the days were growing shorter, and one crept close to the fire at night, and

left the 'possum rugs reluctantly in the morning—a strange thing had happened. Wunbula had gone with other warriors of the tribe to attend a ceremony in the towri of the Gweagal, who dwelt on the southern shore of another great harbour a little farther down the coast. It was an important ceremony, whose attendant celebrations would last for several days, and at all important ceremonies the presence of Wunbula was held to be indispensable. For he was not only justly famed as a warrior and a hunter, but he was also acknowledged to be the greatest youara-gurrugin of his own or any other neighbouring tribe. Not even the Cammeraygal, proud and haughty and numerous as they were, could boast a maker of corroborees to vie with Wunbula.

Sometimes when the mood for making a song came upon him, he would go away by himself, or sit apart, silent and brooding, and Bennilong knew better than to tease him at such times for stories, or to be tossed in the air by his strong arms. And then suddenly words would come from his lips—wonderful words of celebration, battle, or death; words filled with the gaiety of feasts, or the wild triumph of victory, or the long wailing for the dead. Or with another element, dimly sad and yet compelling, stirring the heart, but whether with pride or sorrow his hearers hardly knew.

So Wunbula had gone to the towri of the Gweagal, and joined in their dances and songs, and made an entirely new and very magnificent corroboree for the occasion. But one morning when he had set out with his hosts upon a kangaroo-hunt, he had realised that the mood for hunting was not upon him, and he had left the others and gone alone to the sea cliffs. His companions had watched him go, nodding their approval, for they understood that the words of a great youara-gurrugin come to him most easily in solitude.

But after all no words had come to Wunbula that day. For he had been only a few moments on the cliffs when he had seen something which made his heart leap in his chest, and his pulses hammer with excitement. It was a magic boat. At first only a drift of white to his far-sighted eyes, he saw it come out of the south, and he was afraid, believing it to be a spirit sent by Turong, who rules the water; and he had crouched behind a rock watching it come nearer and nearer until he saw that it was in the likeness of a boat, but that it had great white wings which bore it along over the ocean

like a bird. Fear was still strong in him, but stronger still was that quality which had made him a maker of songs, and he had felt himself shaken and enraptured by the beauty of this marvel, by the grace of its movement, and the billowy curves of its wings. He had stared and stared hungrily while it passed, and then, fearful of losing sight of it for ever, he had leapt to his feet and hurried along the cliffs. But gullies and indentations had so delayed him that it was soon out of sight, vanished around a headland. Presently he had fallen in with the hunting party, and he had told them, wide-eyed, what he had seen. At first they had stared—then laughed—then stared again, but finally they followed him, and when they reached the camp they had found it seething with excitement. For the magic boat had flown into their harbour, and, folding its wings like a seagull, had come to rest.

There it was. There for many days it had remained, and from it had come, in a smaller boat, mysterious beings with faces pale as bones, who spoke an incomprehensible language, and wore coverings not only all over their bodies, but even upon their heads and feet.

All this Bennilong knew because it was all in the corroboree which his father had made to tell of it—the famous Corroboree of the Bereewolgal—which had been several times performed since by his own and other tribes.

And then, as suddenly as they had come, the strangers had departed. One morning quite early, when the creamy film of fog was just lifting from the bay, their boat had spread its wings again, and made for the open sea. Wunbula was home again in his own towri by that time, but it had so happened that about midday, standing upon these same rocks where he stood now, he had seen it pass, making northward up the coast, and he had stood straining his eyes after it until it vanished.

That same afternoon, Bennilong remembered, when his father had left the camp, he had followed at a respectful distance, for he had guessed that Wunbula was going to the flat rock to make images, and he dearly loved to watch this work, though he knew that he was not welcome at such times unless he sat very still and asked but few questions. So he had crept up to find his father already arrived at the great stretch of smooth, flat sandstone, half covered with the things he had made—a huge fish, an emu, very fine and



tall, many shields and boomerangs; but best of all, the whole story of a hunt, showing the two kangaroos with the spears of the hunters in their sides, and the hunters themselves with their arms upflung in triumph.

Wunbula, squatting on his haunches with his bit of sharp flint in his hand, was so still that if Bennilong had not been able to see the bright eyes, fixed and intent beneath their frowning brows, he might have thought him dozing. After a time he began to work, and the sound of the flint, chip, chip, chip, on the rock was so monotonous that Bennilong had fallen asleep, and had not awakened until the shadows were long, and he was beginning to feel cold. Wunbula was still there, but now his head was bent and his hands hung idly, and he looked so full of sorrow that Bennilong sidled up to him curiously and looked over his shoulder. There was the winged boat. Wunbula had made it quite large - larger than anything he had ever made before, except the whale-feast which had covered the whole of a big rock. It was indeed a very strange-looking boat, Bennilong thought, for it had no paddles, and no men were to be seen in it. He breathed admiringly: 'How fine it is!' But Wunbula only shook his head.

That was long ago. The tribe did not bother about the magic boat now. Except when the Corroboree of the Bereewolgal was performed they never thought about it. It was gone. It had never been important to them in any case; it had not touched their lives for more than a few days, nor disturbed the centuries-old rhythm of their existence. Only Wunbula remembered it, and so often now that he had lost count, Bennilong had come with him to the high cliffs of Burrawarra to watch for it. Between them there was a faith unspoken; the winged boat would return.

Yet Bennilong's thoughts of it were different from his father's thoughts. He had not seen it, as Wunbula had, swinging and lifting gallantly over the long swell of the sea, with its wings painted golden by the sunlight, and the little plume of spray at its bows. His thought was that if these beings, these Bereewolgal, could make such a boat, could not he, Bennilong, when he was older, do the same, and so journey across the water out of sight of his own land, as (until this thing had happened) he had believed that no man

could go, and live.

For of course every child in the tribe knew the tale of how long, long ago, in Wunbula's father's boyhood, three men had built a very large strong bark canoe, and they had put out in it between Burrawarra and Boree, the gateways, leaving the sheltered water, and all the tribe had watched from these very cliffs, the women wailing with fear because now the canoe looked so small, and seemed to be from time to time engulfed, disappearing from their sight behind the wall of a great, lifting swell. But the men had paddled on and on until their canoe was only a speck, and then not even a speck, but lost, vanished in the great waste of shining water. And when several nights had come and gone, one of the women, walking on the cliffs farther south, saw the tiny boat almost below her, tossed in the surf, and in it the prone bodies of two men, not three. So she had summoned the tribe, and the men had climbed down to the rocks; and some, by feats of strength and courage still celebrated in corroboree, had dragged one of the men from the pounding surf when the canoe at last smashed to pieces on the rocks. He was very nearly dead; his bones almost pierced his skin, his blackened tongue was pushed between his lips, and only the whites of his eyes showed. But he had recovered at last, and all had waited about him to learn what lay beyond the horizon, for here was a man - the only man - who had crossed the water out of sight, to the place where the sun dwelt. But when he was strong enough to speak he had declared that there was nothing beyond, only the endless water, so that when their eyes had lost the comfort of their own land there was no other, and they had grown afraid, knowing that now indeed they had delivered themselves into the hands of Turong. And Turong had been angered, and had sent sharks to pursue them, and had cast a spell upon one of them so that he stretched himself in the bottom of the canoe and died, and his companions had thrown his body to the sharks, to appease them and their master, Turong. Then they had taken their paddles and paddled desperately towards the declining sun, where their home lay; and in the dawn of the next day they had seen it like a shadow on the horizon, but they were too weak to paddle longer. And the one man who remained had known no more until Turong had cast him into the arms of his comrades, that he



might warn them of the unending water ...

Bennilong stared at it. The unending water. He looked up at his father's lean figure, still motionless, still watching for the boat with wings, and there was born in him a conviction which all through his boyhood was to tease him now and then - that the water was not really unending after all; that somewhere, far, far away, there lay another land; that some day he, Bennilong, not in a bark canoe, but in a boat with wings, would go in search of it.

In Wunbula's mind now, as he stood staring out to sea, there was a strange conflict of thoughts, a quickening of memories, a difficult striving with unfamiliar ideas, a faint premonition of peril and of change. Yet there could be no peril in this land which had not been clearly understood by his forefathers; and against all such assaults of evil, whether upon the body or the spirit, they had evolved and passed down through the centuries a thousand well-tried safeguards. Nor was the thought of change one which dwelt easily in the mind of a man who had never known it. This thought had come to him with the coming of the magic boat, with whose memory it was now painfully and inextricably entangled, and his brows knitted over his eyes with the effort of his concentration. Was there some hidden meaning in this persistent uneasiness which lay like a weight upon his heart? Some miraculous significance for his people and their land?

For them, knowing wealth as contentment, as freedom from hunger, as well-being in the tribe, it was a rich land. It was theirs, and they knew of no other save only, dimly, as a part of their ancestral legends, that their forefathers had come in some remote past age from over the sea. The planets which shone in the midnight sky were not farther from them than the rest of the Earth planet to which their land belonged; the stars, indeed, were neighbourly to them, but the other lands of their own world unknown and unsuspected. The friendly and familiar heavens were an always open book in which they could read inexhaustible and imperishable legends; but the Earth was their land, and only their land, and they, borne upon the rhythm of succeeding generations, were its breath, part of it, so closely knit with it that they changed only as it changed, laying the quiet

centuries behind them as the outer world laid its feverish years.

Here it was as if the pulse of life in plant, and beast, and man had slowed almost to immobility, taking its best from the land itself, which had all eternity in which to change. Here life was marooned, and Time, like a slowly turning wheel, was only night and day, night and day, summer and winter, birth and death, the ebb and swell of tides. Nothing showed for the passing of the ages but a minutely changing coastline, an infinitesimal wearing away of mountains, a barely discernible lifting of coral reefs. Still the ancient grass-tree thrust its tall spear towards the sky; still the platypus laid its eggs and suckled its young as it had done in primaeval times; and still through the high tops of the gum-trees the blue thread of smoke from the black man's fire wavered into the uncorrupted air.

Silence ruled this land. Out of silence mystery comes, and magic, and the delicate awareness of unreasoning things. The black men learned from it, having no other teacher, neither hunger nor danger, and what they learned was different from the learning of mankind in other lands where famine threatened, and wild animals, fierce and powerful, thrust upon it a feverish development of its only weapon - thought. Here thought was less a weapon than another self. A freer self - a communer with mystery. Thought made man one with his environment, knowing a tree as if it were a brother, hearing not only with his ears, weaving so finely from imagination that his creations stood before him, clothed in reality like his fellow-men.

There was nothing in his life which spurred him on to change. Eternity was ever-present to him, past and future interwoven with his own life by legend and unvarying tradition, so that all time was the frame for his mortality, and contentment his heritage. His thought-power, not teased by restlessness, looking inward rather than outward, turned to life as it was, not conceiving a different life, nor wanting it, but loving it as he came to it, and as it received him, turning to it as instinctively as an infant to its mother's breast.

Here was unflinching nourishment. The quiet land was illimitable, unknown, mystery beyond the tribal borders. The black men's awareness of it was like the awareness of a seed for the changing season, of a cicada for the breaking

heat of day, of the shell-fish, sensitive to the wash of seawater over its rock pool. Magic was all about them, entering their lives, their bodies, bringing birth or death. There were many things for laughter - comical things, sounds, postures to be mimicked, children to play with. There were spiritual possessions, vast stores of legend bequeathed to them from a past too remote for their conception; laws, ceremonies, things not to be lightly spoken of, things to be guarded jealously, and passed on to future generations, still sacred and revered. There were songs and tales for firelight, hunting and foraging for noonday, the sharp ecstasies of mating in the dark. Battle was brief, sporadic, ceremonial, a fierce and simple thing of courage, hostility, and skill. Death came hard and swift, like a flung spear. Food was for the seeking, and seeking it they wandered, needing under the mild sky no roof but a fragile one of bark and boughs, and leaving it lightly, as a bird leaves a twig where it has rested.

How, thought Wunbula, staring at the sea, could life change? Was it not eternal, unhalting, everlastingly renewed, and yet everlastingly the same? When a leaf fell, brown and withered, to the ground, did not another, small, moist and red as blood, appear to take its place? When the breath failed on the lips of a man, and his body was buried, carefully shrouded in boughs and leaves that it might not touch the earth, was not the strength and permanence of the tribe assured by a new life? Were not the days and nights already as full as they could be, rich in all things which a man needs - hunting, mating, ceremony, sleep, fierce tests of courage and endurance, tenderness towards the young, reverence for age, compassion for infirmity. How else, cried Wunbula in his heart, could a day pass but as it passed for him, beginning at daybreak, when, from a 'possum rug in his mia-mia he could see the night fading between the tree-tops, and smell the wakening earth? Ending with darkness and the glow of dying firelight, with a silence hardly touched by the mournful note of night-birds, with the familiar stars blurring as eyelids fell in sleep?

No, no, the way of life was fixed; what, then, could change? The Earth? But had it not from time immemorial nurtured their forefathers as now it nurtured them? Had not the grass-tree yielded spear-shafts for the warriors of un-

countable generations? Was there not always bark for a man to fashion his mia-mia, his canoe? Could the trees fail to produce his shields and wommerahs? Was it conceivable that there should be no more clay to adorn him for corroboree, no more stones to be sharpened into knives? How could the land change? Wunbula's wisdom was deep enough, primitive enough, to know that it could not. He knew that a camp deserted became no longer a camp; the bush took it back, dropping twigs and bark over the earth where it had been blackened by fires, trodden by the feet of men, sending new growth where the old had been torn or trampled. Nothing could change the land, the eternal land, to which each generation of men was but one indrawn breath of its endless survival.

Not they themselves could change, and not the earth. What, then? The heavens? But had not man from the dawn of his existence watched the same stars move in their unaltering procession across the sky? Should Baiame, Maker-of-all, the Builder, no longer have his pleasant grove and stream where the broad luminous band lay like a pathway athwart the midnight heavens? Where should the spirits of the dead go but there, to Baiame, to walk with him in happiness and plenty beside his creek whose waters never failed? Was it to be believed that Ngindidoer, the laughing star, should vanish, and that the four warriors of Mirrabooka should be seen no more?

There was no sense in such thoughts. Man and beast, plant and bird, earth and sky were unalterable. Yet, because he was a youara-gurrugin, not only a maker of new tales, but a lover of old tales made long since by other men, Wunbula was still unsatisfied. For he remembered now, and had continually remembered with vague uneasiness ever since the coming of the winged boat, that legends of such things already existed among his people. It was true that he had always felt them to be inferior legends, having no substance, no roots in the established verities of material or spiritual life. They were mere fragments of tales which had travelled, taking generations for the journey, from tribes far, far away. Tales told by a visitor from some more northern towri, learned by him from his father who had them in childhood from one who came from farther north again; forgotten for years, delivered once more from obscurity



by some writing on a message-stick; living precariously but persistently, as legends will while men have tongues to speak and ears to listen. Always tales of strange boats which brought strange people with bone-white faces from the north — whence their own forefathers had come. What were they? Men? Returning spirits of black men long since dead, and now seeking their home again? And when had they come? A lifetime ago, a century ago, ten centuries ago — all were past, and a thousand years hardly more remote than one. For this, Wumbula mused, was the purpose of legends — to bind the past securely to the present; for this new tales were made — to project the present forward into the future, so that man's environment might be made stable, enduring, all-embracing, and the majestic continuity of human life assured. Thus the story of their own ancestors, Mommon and Yaburog, remained always fresh and real. Thus every child became aware of his origin, and knew how his first forefathers had come to the land in a great canoe from across the sea, and how a woman on the shore made a song which wakened a storm so that the canoe was dashed to pieces, and the men marooned. 'Berrugen korillabo' began the tale, familiar as the sound of wind among the trees, 'gerrig Mommon, Yaburog.' Long ago they came, Murri, 'the men,' the forefathers of their race, to go their separate ways, and found their separate tribes, and to make each his own corroboree to pass the story down the generations . . .

Indeed, thought Wumbula, it was abundantly clear that no tribe could survive without its legends and its songs. How should a man live fully who had no song to sing with his fellows, stamping, grunting, acting the tale which it told? How should the hunt keep the full flavour of its virtue if there were no song afterwards in which to re-live its great moments? In the corroboree a man felt himself exalted and renewed; celebrating his valour he became more valorous, chanting his manhood virility welled up anew in him; and in remembering a tale and telling it to his children he touched the fringe of immortality . . .

Therefore he had been wrong to think lightly of those old, unreal tales, told idly sometimes by a dying fire, and soon forgotten. He had preferred robuster tales — of hunts and tribal battles, of storms and floods and great fires, of the machinations of spirits and the movements of stars, of how

Piggiebillah, the prickly one, acquired his spikes, and why Dinewan, the emu, flies no more. Such things, he had held, were of the very stuff of life, and fit material for tales. But now, since he had seen the winged boat himself those ghosts of legends had come suddenly and disturbingly to life. Yet one part of him remembered it ardentlly. How beautiful it was! In his memory it was a thing so lovely and so strange that its strangeness dimmed the outlines of its beauty, and its beauty shone through its strangeness like a star breaking through mist. He told himself that he had done his part. The boat had come and gone, but he had made a corroboree to tell of it, so that the knowledge of it would live in his tribe long after he was dead. And still he was uneasy.

His eyes left the ocean for a moment to stare down at Bennilong. Looking at his son, pondering, he was aware of many things in life never to be explained, and therefore magical — changing of seasons, ebbing and swelling of tides, wind waking out of silence, children coming to birth. Magic was always very near. The land was full of it, gaunt with it, burdened with the secrets of its incredible antiquity. With that inspired awareness which is the heritage of creatures who live and move to the rhythms of nature, Wumbula began to perceive that between Bennilong and the boat with wings there stretched a thread — frail, invisible, intangible, not to be too inquisitively considered. He knew that some power beyond his comprehension were at work — that in some destiny whose patterns and purpose was not for his understanding, Bennilong and the boat with wings would come together.

Bennilong did not really expect the boat to come to-day — he had been too often disappointed. But he liked these expeditions, for they made him feel important, and there were moments when his father's persistent expectancy reawakened wonder in him, and set him scanning the empty ocean with an attention which the first dipping seagull easily deflected. But though he never upon any one occasion expected that the boat would come that day, he did not doubt that it would come some day — in a future too far away to be real or important to him now. Did not his father say so? And was there another in the tribe whose word was more regarded?

He sighed heavily, his finger still tracing curly marks upon

the sand. And then suddenly he stopped, astonished, excited, for had he not himself made an image of life in the sand? Was not that coiling line Kuurang, over whose sinister trail his mother had lifted him when he was little, that its evil might not cause sores upon his feet? He began to be afraid. He looked up at his father again, and now tears welled in earnest and had to be hurriedly smeared away with the back of his hand, for he was not sure whether the thing which he had made had power to harm him or not, and he muttered: 'Wi! Wi!' edging away from it. Then for one moment the blackness of a paralysing fear swept upon him, and he stared, his eyes round, his mouth round; for Wunbula had turned to him, and planted his great bare foot firmly upon the image of Kuurang, Kuurang himself, the trail of Kuurang - what was it? What would happen?

He stood close against his father's side, with held breath, and Wunbula's hand came down and lay comfortingly upon his head. Nothing happened but reassurance, the fading of that monstrous suspicion that perhaps even a little boy like himself might work an evil magic without knowing it. His breath went out in a sigh of relief, and he leaned contentedly against his father's side, his eyes heavy with sleepiness. Blurred, lazily unfocused, they saw only colour - white, blue, white. The far-away white was the line of surf against the cliffs of Boree, the blue was the stretch of water, the nearer white was beneath his nose, and his nose as well as his eyes approved it. Where the water frothed it was white, and here was another kind of froth, smothering the shrubs, drenching the hot air with its honey-sweet scent. Looking more intently he could see the small brown body of Kuji, the bee, burrowing into one of the wide-open flowers.

Wunbula said:

'We will return to the camp. The winged boat will not come to-day.' He looked down at Bennilong and gave his shoulder a little shake. 'Would you be lazy and bring shame upon your father and your tribe? Come, walk swiftly, like a man!'

He strode off across the hot sand between the prickly shrubs, and Bennilong, squaring his shoulders, ran zealously to catch him up.

When they were nearly home they came upon Kuurang himself, coiled upon a warm rock in the sun. As Wunbula

leapt forward the long, brown shape ringed with darkish bands writhed into movement with astonishing swiftness, and Bennilong, dancing with excitement, yelled to his father to hasten. Just as the blow was about to fall Kuurang turned upon his attacker, and Bennilong saw the gleam of his under-side as he lifted his malevolent head to strike. But Wunbula was too quick; there was a crack, and then Kuurang was dead, though he moved convulsively, lying there on the rock with his back broken, and would continue to move thus for a long time. Wunbula grunted with satisfaction, and Bennilong, jubilant, stood over the slain enemy with his hands on his knees, gloating.

There was a creek at the bottom of the gully along whose northern ridge they were travelling, so they left Kuurang lying there, and scrambled down the hillside for a drink. Here, in the shade, it was cool and secret-smelling, the rocks in the creek bed were thickly cushioned with green moss, and the water trickled round and between them with a pleasant sound. On the branch of a tall tree Gougourgahgah was sitting, fat and fluffy with contentment, puffin his feathers out, his head, with its powerful beak and its wise, bright eyes, held a little to one side while he regarded them. Bennilong thought of the snake which they had killed, and which Gougourgahgah would have dearly loved for his supper, and he cried gleefully to Wunbula: 'He does not know, the foolish one, what we have just done!' And while they chucked over this, suddenly Gougourgahgah burst out, too, into his wild, harsh laughter, and it seemed to them so comical that he should thus join in their mirth against himself, that they laughed harder than ever, holding their sides.

When they had finished their drink, and Bennilong had jumped into a pool and splashed himself all over with cold water, they climbed up the other side of the gully, and set off for home again. It was almost sundown when they came to the camp, and they could hear the noise of the dogs and the shouting of the children, and see through the lengthening shadows the glimmer of the fires. The children were playing the game of thirringunna, and Bennilong could see his elder sister, Carangarang, standing in a clearing facing the last glare of the declining sun, while the others scattered through the shadowed bush to their hiding-places. Presently



their shrill calls came from a dozen different places, each like the echo of another and a real echo, far away, bore the sound of their challenge down into silence as lightly as a leaf falling. But Wunbula's long stride did not falter, and they passed the children and came into the camp.

There were no men about—they were not yet back from hunting—and Bennilong, leaving his father's side, ran to the mia-mia before which his mother, squatting on the ground, was suckling his baby sister, Warreweer. It was fine and it was adventurous, he thought, to have spent the whole long day far from camp with his father, and because of it he felt a little contemptuous of Warreweer, who did not know how to walk yet, and even of Carangarang whom he loved, and who tended him only less devotedly than his mother. But now that night was coming, and there was to be felt in the stomach that empty clamouring which always came with dusk, it was good to be home again with the tribe. It was good to sit close to his mother's warm bare side at the doorway of his home, and to know that inside it soft 'possum rugs awaited him when, replete with the scraps from his parents' meal, he should feel moved to curl himself upon them.

Warreweer had ceased to suck, and was holding out her arms and making gurgling noises to Bennilong. Looking up at her, where she lay across her mother's shoulder, he could see the gleam of four tiny teeth in her gums, and he took her fat wrist, to which a kangaroo's tooth was tied, and guided it to her mouth as he had seen his mother do. She gnawed at the tooth placidly, and, suddenly, out of the midst of his contentment Bennilong realised that there was a core of grief to this perfect day. For was it not to see the winged boat that they had gone to the cliffs of Burrawarra, and had not the winged boat failed to come? For the first time he was conscious of this failure as a disappointment to himself. Always before it had been his father's disappointment, and the emotions of grown people were strange and remote from him. But to-day, it suddenly seemed to him, he had wanted to see the boat himself. The desire to see it swelled in him like his rages did sometimes, till it felt as if his body could not hold a longing so fierce and violent, and suddenly he pinched Warreweer's foot viciously, so that she squealed, and his mother gave him a cuff which sent

him sprawling and provided him with an excuse for the yells which were, in reality, only an outlet for the misery of his frustrated desire.

The camp was quieter than usual. The night was gathering around it, and each of the score or so of mia-mias was flickeringly lit by a small fire burning before it. The women were cooking such articles of food as their day's foraging had afforded, and Bennilong, feeling better once his tantrum had subsided, edged nearer to his mother again to watch her take the spoil of her day's fishing and foraging from the woven grass basket at her side. There were four big fish and a lizard and some oysters, and a handful of fat witchetty grubs—yes, it would be a good supper to-night—there should be plenty left for himself and Carangarang, even after their parents had eaten. From a coolamon filled with water came a honey scent which made his mouth water for the sweet drink which he would be allowed to sip when the time came. He knew better than to be importunate. Already he had been one, the youngest, of a party of children taken on a two-day foodless march, and he remembered with pride that when the women met them with a meal at the end of the second day he had quelled the clamourings of his ravenous stomach, and taken only what would have been his portion for one small meal. His reward was the commendation of the elders of the tribe, and Wunbula's laughing, prideful cry: 'Here is the making of a fine man! Carangarang, too, had come through the ordeal well. But Yambeetch, the oldest of the party except Carangarang, and she, after all, was only a girl, had failed, and had brought shame and disgrace upon himself and upon his father. For he had been caught trying to take more when no one was looking, and his father had beaten and scolded him, saying what would become of a tribe whose members could not learn to control their hunger, who could not practise endurance and self-denial?

But then Yambeetch was not much good anyhow. It was a great shame to his father and his mother and his brothers. For when the time had come, a little while ago, for the tribal marking of the older children, and they had been gathered round the medicine man to receive and endure their cuts, he had been afraid even at the sight of the shell knife, and when his time came he had struggled and cried out, so that

now he was known as Yambeetch, 'the unworthy.' But Carangarang had stood straight and still while the three long, red cuts sprang out across her body, following the point of the knife, and afterwards, too, when the bleeding was stopped with charcoal and the wounds packed with white clay to make the scars stand out fine and beautiful. He, too, Bennilong resolved, would not move or cry out when his time came; and he sighed impatiently, feeling that life was endless, and that he could not be patient for his longing to be grown up like his father, Wunbula, strong like him, brave like him, a leader in the tribe.

For the truth was that Bennilong liked to show off a little. When he played with the other boys he always laughed louder and talked more than anybody else, and though the children were treated with great indulgence, his volatility had often brought him reproof or a blow. And he thought, upon these occasions, that there could be nothing finer than to be a man, free to come and go at will, free to eat largely of the best part of the food, free to lift his voice when he would, and to be heard with respect. Nor were these all the prizes of manhood. Of the others he thought not at all in the bright daylight, but only at night, when thoughts became merged with dreams, and between waking and sleeping he knew that great matters were afoot, a stirring and whispering among the women, a purposeful activity among the men, an awed anticipation, half-fearful and half-exalted, among the youths. Where did they go? Through a sleep as light as a dingo's, all his body, delicately alert, twitched a response to the high waves of nervous tension which enmeshed the camp. Coming up out of this haunted half-consciousness, opening his eyes fearfully upon a place deserted by all but its womenfolk and young children, he had heard from far away the wild roaring of the great spirit who made youths into men, and he had shut his eyes tightly, burying his face in the 'possum rugs, plunging back into sleep where these awesome and beckoning things would merge again into the half-reality of dreams. No child spoke of these sacred matters; no woman witnessed them. But at the back of Bennilong's mind the knowledge of them lay mistily, a promise, a threat, a dedication.

When Bennilong thought of manhood he thought of his

father, Wunbula; but when he thought of his own manhood he thought of Colbee, a short and sturdily built youth, very strong, and with a decision of character which already marked him as a potential leader. Bennilong often watched him, and he noticed that though Colbee made no effort to claim attention he was given, as if by right, a leading part in the activities of the young men. Somehow, although he did not wish it to be so, Bennilong always felt his own noisiness clamouring for outlet more urgently when Colbee was near. He desired very ardently that Colbee should notice him (though he knew it to be ridiculous to imagine that so magnificent a person should ever notice an unimportant little boy) and he pushed the other children about, and boasted loudly to them, and capered and sang, all the time uneasy and unhappy, because he knew that not thus would Colbee himself behave.

Years, in that land, were marked only by the growing of children into manhood and womanhood, and the fading of men and women into age and death. Sometimes a season might be made memorable by floods of rain, or by long drought which dried the creeks to mere trickles, and set fires raging through the bush until the beasts fled, and lean times came upon the tribe.

Sometimes there were battles. When Bennilong was in the first stage of his initiation, certain warriors from a hostile tribe invaded their territory and stole two young women who were returning from fishing with their catch. One was Carangarang, who resisted with such spirit that she had to be clubbed into insensibility. Her avengers followed the trail all day; Bennilong, and his friends By-gone, Kuaurin and Ballederry, sick with envy and excitement, watched them go. Towards evening the tribes met. Halted in a clearing under the slanting sunlight, they defied each other fiercely with songs and terrible grimaces; stamping and grunting, brandishing their spears, they sang:

'Burran, burin, bilar bundi  
Murala berar karni!'

Their voices rose in a frenzy of martial enthusiasm, their faces were contorted with rage, their spirits rushed to meet



this moment which demanded a demonstration of their courage and their virility. Spears began to fly. Straight and hard and true, their shafts making a golden streak through the evening light, they glanced from skilfully turned shields, buried their points in the ground and stood swaying softly, or found their way into the naked bodies for which they were aimed. Every time this happened there was a crescendo in the shouting, and when Wunbula staggered and fell with a nine-foot shaft quivering in his side his companions lifted their voices in a wild yell of fury.

For who was left to them now to make such songs as Wunbula had made? Who, for the glory of the tribe, was to record upon the rocks the story of their hunting and their tribal life? When the battle was over and the enemy had retreated they hardly noticed the two causes of it who, bloodstained and limping, crept out from the undergrowth to join them. Carangarang crouched over Wunbula's body and wailed while the warriors rested and made preparation for their return. And suddenly out of her wallings words came, praise for Wunbula, maker-of-songs, maker-of-images, bold warrior, great hunter, tender father. Praise to Wunbula who in his life had brought much honour to his tribe, and who in his death had avenged its insult . . .

But the words faded as swiftly as they had been born; smitten with fear of her own temerity, she glanced round apprehensively upon a ring of startled, hostile faces. They stared back at her suspiciously; were not these such words as Wunbula himself might have sung, and was it fitting that they should be heard from the lips of a woman? They said nothing, but she understood their condemnation, and abased herself before its justice. For her and for her mother and for her little sister, Warreweer, there must be only the wordless wailing at sunset, the women's ritual of mourning. Humbly she followed them home.

It seemed to Bennilong that his father's death in battle accelerated his own progress to manhood. He grew stronger and taller than most of his fellows, and the tribal scars stood out proudly on his body. He became a fine hunter, and though he never learned to make images upon the rocks as his father had done, he did occasionally make songs. He almost forgot the magic boat now that Wunbula was

no longer at hand to remind him of it, but sometimes, skirting the high sea-cliffs, he would pause for a moment, remembering, and stare out at the horizon with a faint stir of expectation. In the tribe he was warily handled because of his sudden rages, and his vanity which was easily affronted; but he was popular, too, for his light-hearted antics, his endearing self-importance, and his gift of buffoonery.

In his early manhood his tribe prepared for a great ceremony to celebrate the last stage of the initiation of a number of its young men. A messenger was sent to summon the neighbouring tribes. Elaborately decorated, and bearing a torch at night to frighten the evil spirits of the darkness, he passed through the land with his invitation, and in many camps a stir of preparation began. From farther down the coast came the Gweagal. From across the harbour warriors of the Cammeraygal arrived, proud and a little aloof; from the north, travelling several days and nights, came the Awabakal, from the shores of the great lake which gave them their name. Each party as it approached sent an emissary in advance, as courtesy demanded, bearing a message-stick to announce its arrival into the territory of its hosts, and upon reaching the camp was warmly welcomed and hospitably entertained.

While they waited for some of the more distant tribes they passed the days in hunting and the nights in corroborees in which both hosts and guests joined. Bennilong was proud to find that many of his father's most famous corroborees were well known to the visitors, and wild with delight when, as Wunbula's son, he was pressed to perform the main part in one of them. This he did with great spirit, enjoying himself hugely, and later he sang one of his own songs so that all his audience cried out in approval and congratulation. He thought, stamping and singing in the cleared circle, that life was indeed good, and could hold no greater joy than that of being a man. It was a warm, still night, and the sweat ran down his body as he danced. Behind the dim circle of onlookers the tree-trunks rose straight and silver, and when he flung his head back he could see only a small patch of sky above him, with the white, misty line of Baiame's pleasant stream winding across it. Together in a group the women sat watching, their bodies touched warmly by the firelight, swaying and bending in time to the rhythm of his song, and

Bennilong felt his eyes drawn to them, held for the moment by the lustrous brightness of a pair of eyes, or the play of shadow and firelight on a smooth shoulder or the alluring curve of a breast.

These things made him think of the child bride betrothed to him in infancy, and not yet marriageable, and there came to him, with an urgency which he had not felt before, the conviction that he must set about procuring a wife to cook his food and bear his children in the meantime. There were many good things in the life of a man, and now they were all his save this; and in this, as in hunting and fighting and corroboree, a man must prove himself. His thoughts as he sang and stamped in the firelight flickered about the women of his own tribe who were available to him. There were not many, for the rules which governed marriage were strict, and the penalties for infringement were severe. Most of the young women were already betrothed or married, and of those who were not many belonged to his own kobong and were, therefore, forbidden to him. There was Peeka, the widow of one of the old men who had died, and there was Peecharn, but she was notoriously idle, and her catch after a day's fishing was always small. Then there was Kuumarneen, but although she had had two husbands she had borne no children, and it was evident that the birth-spirit was not kindly disposed towards her. There was Ma-neela, but she was ill-favoured, and there was Goonoolameear, quite impossibly talkative, and there was Barangaroo, also a widow, but her fiery temper had already brought strife and trouble to one husband, and besides she was older than himself which vaguely offended his dignity, so she was out of the question, too . . .

Suddenly there she was, looking straight at him. Intruding so sharply into his only half-formed thoughts of her, he felt his exuberance checked and damped, and looked away, resenting this encroachment upon his mood. He danced more and more wildly, leaping higher and higher into the air; brave words poured resonantly from between his lips. His eyes slid round again to seek her, and darkened with anger to find that she was not looking at him now, but past him into the night.

When his song was ended he flung himself down among the others, exhausted, but happy in the acclaim which greeted

him. Indeed, he thought with joyful complacency, he was in a fair way to become, like his father, Wunbula, a great youara-gurrugin, and his fame would pass over the land to all the tribes. He lay flat on his back, staring up at the tree-tops, his breath still coming quickly. He could see the four bright stars which were the departed spirits of two chiefs and their brothers, and smaller, paler, the fifth star which was the woman, Namirra, who had brought them all to death.

Barangaroo awakened in the pale dawn. The night had been warm so she had pushed aside her possum skins, and lay now on her back, blinking and yawning, and thinking, almost at once, of Bennilong. Indeed, she could hardly have done otherwise, for she had wakened not refreshed, but weary and ill at ease, because, while she slept, her Dowee, her other self, had been abroad in that confused chaotic world which only the Dowees could visit. And there it had encountered the Dowee of Bennilong, and together they had made a stupendous journey whose details Barangaroo could only dimly recall, and together they had faced appalling perils, and the Dowee of Bennilong had performed prodigious feats of valour whose nature she could not now remember at all, and no less prodigious feats of love which made her feel weak with pride and ecstasy.

She sat up, pushing her tangle of dark hair away from her brows, and glanced with distaste at the other occupants of the mia-mia. They were both old women - widows, like herself, but much too old and too ugly ever to find husbands again. She looked down with a rather mournful pleasure at her own coppery body, lifting her arms and watching the way the movement drew her breasts upwards, turning her head sideways to admire the smooth roundness of her shoulder, frowning at the spear-wounds in her thigh, bending forward to approve the symmetry of the tribal scars across her middle.

Her hair fell into her eyes, and she tossed it back, drawing her knees up and clasping her arms round them, staring at the first pale glimmer of sunlight on the tree-trunks, but not seeing it for the clamour and urgency of her thoughts.

She had been betrothed at birth to Koo-wee, a great man, and a leader, but by the time she was ready to marry him he had another wife who had scolded and beaten her a good deal. After a time she had borne two children, but both



had died, and the older wife had persuaded her husband that Barangaroo had offended Wadahgudjaelwon the birth-spirit, and that he should seek another young wife. So he had taken a girl called Tuupuun, and Barangaroo had been wild with jealousy, for Koo-wee was still a great man, strong and comely in spite of his grey hairs, and she had quarrelled bitterly and incessantly with her rival. She would show her husband, she thought fiercely, that she had not offended the birth-spirit; and aching with resentment, hungry for her two dead children, she had gone seeking others in the places where their spirits dwelt until suitable mothers could be found for them. There was no tree, no cave, no rock where they were known to wait that she had not visited, but Wadahgudjaelwon had not relented. Instead, he had placed a baby-spirit in the body of Tuupuun, and when Barangaroo knew of this she became mad with grief and fury and rushed at Tuupuun and they fought like wildcats, tearing each other's hair and faces until the blood ran over their bodies. But Barangaroo was the stronger, and she had borne Tuupuun to the ground and beaten her with a yam-stick until she was senseless, and because of this the baby of Tuupuun had been born before its time, and born dead.

Then it was Tuupuun's turn to hate, and one night she had stolen one of her husband's spears, and had tried to kill Barangaroo while she lay asleep, but it was dark and she was still weak, so her aim was faulty, and the spear had passed through Barangaroo's thigh, pinning her to the ground, where she was left till morning, for everyone thought that it served her right.

And a week or two later Koo-wee had been killed, and they were both widows. When the time of mourning had expired Tuupuun had found another husband readily enough, but no man had wanted the fierce and sullen Barangaroo. By now she was used to being ignored by the young men of her tribe, but the coming of so many others to the camp had wakened an old unrest in her again, and she had gone to the corroboree last night full of sadness for the good things which had been taken from her—for her lost status as a married woman, for the two babies who had died, for the esteem of her tribe which was hers no longer.

For a long time now she had watched Bennilong. He was cheerful and noisy and full of an abounding vigour which

called to her own rebelliously smothered vitality. Last night his singing had stirred her; she had hardly heard his words, but his voice and his leaping figure and the infectious excitement which he generated had made a warmth in her blood, an unevenness in her breathing, a brightness in her eyes.

Her brows drew together in a frown which her tribe knew, and into her heart came an enormous resolve. There was beauty and ripeness in her still; she was not old and withered like the two who snored beside her, but fit for any man. As if to confirm her decision with instant physical activity, she slid through the opening of the mia-mia, and stood erect outside it, stretching luxuriously.

Through the trees the water was just visible, cool and grey in the morning light, and she left the camp and wandered down the hillside, stopping now and then on some rocky outcrop to look about her. She was hardly conscious of what she saw, for it was all too familiar; she looked at it not to see it, but to feel the stability which flowed from it to her. When she pushed through a grove of honey-scented wattle, or trod knee-deep among the pink boronia, she did not notice their fragrance—but its absence would have touched her nerves with warning. Her reaction to her environment was that of all her people, to whom the earth was simply cradle, hunting-ground and bier. Because it had never occurred to them to coerce the soil they lived in utter harmony with it. They did not demand that it produce and produce, exhausting its fertility, but were content with what it gave them, leaving undisturbed its serene cycle of disintegration and renewal. The trees which she passed clambering down to the water's edge she recognised as she would have recognised a man or woman of her tribe, and although their fallen branches would feed her fire, and their bark fashion her canoes, they maintained, not in her thoughts, but more deeply, their places as fellow-inhabitants of a land in whose earth both their lives and her own were rooted.

Coming out from the shadows of the bush, she stood on a rock overhanging the water; feeling the first faint warmth of the early sunlight touch her body like a caress, she thought again of Bennilong.

About noon that day Bennilong and his friends, By-gone and Ballederry, took a party of their visitors across in their

canoes to an island in the harbour called Mem-el, which belonged to Bennilong, and from its rocks they sported and amused themselves, diving and swimming and spearing fish. When they were weary of this they sat in the shade, and the visitors told tales of their own tribal territory. Some came from a place two days' journey to the westward, where a great river flowed; here there were many ducks which the warriors caught by binding leaves and rushes about their heads; then, swimming softly, they came upon their unsuspecting prey and dragged them beneath the water and broke their necks with a swift turn of the wrist. One of the young men sang a song which he had made about it:

*'Here a great water runs*

*Pleasant as the stream in Baime's grove;*

*Behind it the hills go up into the sky,*

*Far away they go. What land lies there?*

*Is it the land of Tippakal*

*He who comes in darkness*

*And bears sleeping men from the mia-mia and the fire?*

*Here is a better land where many ducks are;*

*Many ducks sit upon the water,*

*And the hunters catch them.'*

Bennilong applauded politely, but privately he thought that it was not a very good song.

When the afternoon was fading they took to their canoes and began to paddle back to the mainland. As they came round the point of the island they met the canoes of a party of women who had been fishing. Barangaroo, when she saw Bennilong, wound in her line swiftly; after a little while he noticed, with annoyance, that her canoe was keeping pace with his, though at a respectful distance. She did not look at him, but paddled steadily, her arms and her wet paddle flashing rhythmically in the sun.

Bennilong's arms moved faster, the great muscles of his shoulders strained. One of his guests was with him in his canoe, and soon they shot ahead of the others, but still Barangaroo kept pace, and behind them Bennilong heard a little screech of laughter and mockery go up from the other women, now left far behind. He stared thunderously across the intervening water, but Barangaroo did not even glance

his way. He began to exert all his strength and skill. His canoe was large and heavy, and he had a passenger; Barangaroo's was smaller, and she was alone. Nevertheless, it enraged him that he could not outdistance her, particularly as every one had now accepted it as a race, and not only from the women, but from the men behind them, came shouts of mocking encouragement.

They beached almost simultaneously. Bennilong jumped out on the sand, his vanity smarting, his rage choking in his throat, and at this moment Barangaroo chose to look at him. She ran half-way up the beach, turned to laugh, pointing a derisive finger, and then ran for the shelter of the bush.

Bennilong, always the slave of his tempestuous emotions, lost his head entirely. Furious, he started in pursuit, leaving his guest, splitting his sides with laughter, on the beach. Barangaroo was fleet enough, but she was tired, nor did she greatly want to escape, though her heart was thumping with fear. He caught her just as she reached the rocky slope of the hull, and she turned on him like a fury, biting, scratching, kicking.

This was all in order, and easily dealt with. Already Bennilong's resentment was being transmuted into desire, his wounded male pride assuaged by the consciousness of his strength and dominance. He gave her a blow on the side of the head which reduced her to half-swooning acquiescence, and then, grabbing her by the wrist, made off into the kindly shelter of the bush. She was too giddy to run behind him for more than a few paces. Then she stumbled and fell and was dragged along the ground. The stones bruised her body and the prickly shrubs tore her skin, but it is the fate of woman to be captured, and pain is her lot, so neither she nor Bennilong accounted her suffering as anything but the normal preliminary to his rough wooing.

When the dusk came quietly between the trees, he stood up and began to think of the fish he had speared and loaded into his canoe. He was very, very hungry. By now they would be prepared; they would be taken from the hot stones of the ovens and carefully released from their wrappings of wet grass and leaves, and the smell of them would be good in the nostrils of hungry men. Life was perfect and complete.