The University of Sydney

2 January 1827.

Dear Sir Baldwin,

Thank you for your letter of Dec 27th. I am greatly interested to hear the results of the examination of hair which is, of course, what one would have been inclined to expect.

As to the spelling of native words in your new book, I most strongly recommend retaining the same spelling that you used before. No one will make any criticism of that and on the contrary some might criticise if you changed.

The fact that I sometimes use a
It is difficult for me to write in any way a criticism of your procedure. Some of us are trying to introduce, as far as possible, a vernacular phonetic spelling for native languages generally, and I have therefore adopted as far as I can a system similar to that by Father Schmidt and that used by Neuwof and his school for African languages. In these systems, e. g. ni for the vowel in 'full', or, with a dieresis, for that in 'pool'. The second vowel in Aranda seems to me to be the one head in such an English word as 'but' and this I should write as a phonetic transcription as ë, making the sound arânta or arânda. But in many of the dialects this sound must be omitted, and an entirely new spell must be used for an arânta or ë. However, all of my own experience has been that it is exceedingly difficult to distinguish the vowels from the various enclitics in Australian languages, so that it does not really matter much which one uses in any particular instance. Amongst the Varnam spellings of the names of the Arunta I found only two that need be commented: and y then the form Aranda was meant to my own system and so I fell into the habit of using that form. I think that on the whole I would prefer to go on doing this, but I would at the same time strongly recommend you to keep to your old spelling, which we all recognize as yours.
and as being quite as accurate as your system as any other. I think exactly the same thing applies to such words as churinga and alchera. No one will or can criticize the spellings which have found their way from your books into a vast number of others.

The spelling of Australian languages has been chaotic in the extreme. All that is required of any ethnologist is that he should spell consistently and explain to his readers the phonetic value of the letters and signs he uses. I hope that one day, when dictionaries and texts in native languages are concerned, it may be possible to introduce a scientific phonetic system and attain uniformity and exactness. But till this has been done there is no standard or canon.
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I have heard from Sidney Ray and he does not seem inclined to consider taking up the study of an Australian language, but expresses willingness to consider a definite offer to come and carry further his work on Papuan and Melanesian languages.

I hear that the Australian National Research Council has nominated you as its representative on an Advisory Committee on Anthropology in connection with the work here. It has been suggested that a meeting of this committee should be held during the second week of February. I hope that you will be free to attend at that time.