

University.

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Melbourne.

Sept 7. 06.

Prof. Rhys.

Dear Sir,

My friend Dr. Hornitt has shown me a letter in which you refer to the belief held by the Arunta and other Central Australian tribes, and also by tribes on the Eastern Coast, that children are the reincarnations of old ancestors and that the intercourse of the sexes has nothing to do, save in a very subsidiary way, with the appearance of children.

You also mention the very interesting and suggestive fact that, in original fairy tales, it is common to find that all of the fairies are women.

Though some writers such as Mr. Andrew Lang attempt to throw ridicule upon the Central Australian

believe yet it is simply a fact that  
this exists. Mr. Jellen & myself met  
with it amongst all the tribes in  
the Centre of Australia & away  
eastward to the Gulf of Carpentaria &  
it is scarcely likely that it should  
be confined to the particular tribe  
which we happened to meet with.

We know at the present day of  
men & women in the Arunta & Storr  
tribes each of whose sacred or secret  
name is that of an old ancestor.  
celebrated in their myths & the  
individual bears that name because he  
or she is supposed to be the re-incarnation  
of that special ancestor.

With our present day knowledge of  
physiology it is very difficult for us  
to place ourselves in the mental attitude  
of a primitive man who had no  
knowledge whatever of physiological  
processes & to whom everything was really  
a matter of magic.

We of course are well aware that

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of two women one of whom is  
married & the other is not the former  
is the only one who can bear children  
but the savage has no such knowledge  
from which to draw any conclusion.

It is a most logically avoided  
individual & inasmuch as he knows  
that every girl & woman in the tribe  
has such marital relations & that some  
do & some do not bear children he  
naturally comes to the conclusion that  
intercourse has nothing to do with  
child-bearing & rather he does not  
recognize that it has. Not only is

this so but, as Mr. Drayton has pointed  
out, the time which may elapse  
between intercourse & that at which  
the woman knows that she is pregnant  
is quite enough to prevent any recognition  
in the savage mind of the connection  
between the two facts.

I am inclined to think that the  
idea of re-incarnation of ancestors is a  
very primitive one.

Believe me Very sincerely yours

W. H. R. Spencer.