

Coon

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10 May 90

My dear Spencer.

I am afraid we cannot come to terms upon this much vexed question of "totemism": however, as we have both tried to explain existing facts, and offered opinions diametrically opposed to another, there is no reason why we should not discuss other matters. To tell you the truth, it is indeed a pleasure for me up here, away from civilization - so far as the scientific element is concerned - to have a five minutes talk by letter.

I am very grateful to you at any rate for your criticism re "Elihu" etc, and you are quite justified, so far as I am

concerned, in taking up the position which you do. However, as there will evidently now be a lot written by careful observers in the future upon these varying systems of classification, would it not be advisable to form a small committee of the whole - e.g. yourself, Huxtt, Fison, etc and draw up a standard of some sort, so that these various groups can be conveniently tabulated, and carefully named if you like, so that there will be no doubt as to which groups (primary, secondary etc) are being referred to. Of course I would fall in with the views - if a majority - of any such private coterie: at present even I

have a lot of M.S.S. ready, and will be only too pleased to hold anything back provided there is any chance of our getting uniformity in our work.

In other matters also, there is a lot of ambiguity - e.g. the "throwing-stick", "yam-stick", "Throwing-stick" at present is apparently applied to such things as - a spear-thrower, ^{Wommera} a "nulla-nulla" two kinds of toys.

"Yam-stick" may also mean a stick for digging yams. a fighting-pole.

And so on with many others. Surely if you scientific men ^{South} ~~had~~ drew up some regulation for the adoption prevention of

such mis-nomers it would do
a world of good.

As for Carroll and his Anthro-
pological Journal, - I saw
the first copy - unlike Pear's
Soap I have never used it ^{since!}

Strange to say, for the
last four years I have been
collecting from N.W. Central,
^{Central} Queensland, and the Gulf
Country, and now from the far
north. My private collection
with about 600 ~~different~~ ^{separate} objects
(50 of them skeletons & skulls)
I have also arranged on the
Pitt-Rivers type - though of course
in a small house such as mine
things ~~have~~ cannot be shewn to
such advantage as in a Museum.
Now of course that I am

concerned, in taking up the position which you do. However, as there will evidently now be a lot written by careful observers in the future upon these varying systems of classification, would it not be advisable to form a small Committee of the whole - e.g. yourself, Hottel, Fison, etc and draw up a standard of some sort, so that these various groups can be conveniently tabulated, and carefully named if you like, so that there will be no doubt as to which groups (primary, secondary etc) are being referred to. Of course I would fall in with the views - if a majority - of any such private coterie: at present even I

have a lot of A.S.S. ready, and will be only too pleased to hold anything back provided there is any chance of our getting uniformity in our work.

In other matters also, there is a lot of ambiguity - e.g. the "throwing-stick", "yam-stick", "Throwing-stick" at present is apparently applied to such things as - a spear-thrower, ^{Woomera} a "mulla-mulla" two kinds of toys.

"Yam-stick" may also mean a stick for digging yams. a fighting-pole.

And so on with many others. Surely if you scientific men ^{South} ~~had~~ drew up some regulation for the adoption prevention of

a Government official, anything of special interest will go to my department down in Brisbane.

I believe the Brisbane Museum is extra strong in New Guinea things, though the authorities there are very much cramped for space.

I returned last week from a trip to Thursday Island and Normanston. At the former place I met Haddon and some of his party. I told them how delighted I was to hear of their expedition, as they might find traces of many ethnological connecting links between New Guinea and Malaya on the one hand, and Cape York, with North Queensland, on

the other.

With regard to my anthropometric measurements (each accompanied by photo. of front and profile) I unfortunately do not possess a Broca's goniometer, or what ever name is applied to the instrument. So will have to get some mathematician ultimately to deduce the facial angle from the other measurements. What a joke,

- yes, the odour is pretty strong at times, but the statement is new to me that the smell of a native increases as he gets excited. I will look out for it ^{at} any rate. There is a reverse side to the picture however - the blacks at Bolivia used to declare that they could not

stand the stench from us whites! I am looking forward with very great pleasure to seeing your and Silliman's book published - and sincerely trust that you will succeed in getting Macmillan to take the financial responsibility off your hands.

Your remarks re the average European Anthropologist not seeming able to put on one side the ideas of relationship to which he has hitherto been accustomed, are such as I can heartily endorse. It was a great puzzle for me to understand ~~how~~ for a long time how it was that a man could have so many mothers! - indeed the system of

social organization was the hardest thing to grasp.

With regard to "fancy" wife, I mean the wife of the man's own choice in contradistinction to the one allotted him by the general camp-council - his "official" wife. You see, he may not personally care for his official wife, though he is obliged to take her. Both; in fact all, his ~~wife~~ wives must of course belong to the same group - the group to which the females of which I applied the term "sisters-in-law". If a man attempted surreptitious intercourse with any but his "sisters-in-law", it would prove disastrous for him - probably death: with any of his "sisters-in-law" however no notice would be taken, unless

their husbands of course chose to object.

By the by, did I tell you that there is a most complicated system of "taboo" up here, the very same word "taboo" or "jaboo" being used to give expression to it.

Good old Martin - he is a splendid fellow - please pay him my best respects: the fact of his having been appointed Professor of Physiology at Melbourne is quite new to me.

No, I have not read Howitt's paper on the Organization of Australian tribes, and would be delighted if you could spare me the loan of a copy as you kindly suggest. Mr. Fison was good enough to send me ^{his} "Classificatory System etc": in the course of my last letter to him, I told him that

Very sincerely yours
W. E. Roth

we disagreed over the "totems" and that if he cared to learn my views I had stated them to you.

Now, with regard to publishing - I cannot do anything now without permission, though I know full well that it would be granted at head-quarters as soon as asked for. I have a lot of MSS. in hand at the present moment, and am continually sending down reports to my chief, though, in view of fire or flood, I take a ^{pen-}copy of everything (even sketches) before it leaves my possession. For instance this work I am sending ^{down a report on} down, ^{Some} of the Native Foods of the Bloomfield River Aboriginals. Next work I shall have a lot of diagrams relative to "Cat's cradle" to send down. I am also just

at present completing the drawings for an article on the "Mesh of the Queensland dilly-bag" - these have taken me a terribly long time to work up. - I have watched and studied the whole process of manufacture of all but two of the dozen or so different varieties. And then committing it to paper - well you are yourself deft with your pencil, and can realize what a "grind" it entails. To tell you the candid truth, I am not really anxious to publish until such time as I have worked through all this Cape York Peninsula, and then make every thing "Comparative." I think it is far better to do that than to let out a little bit here and there. Up here there is apparently a good deal New Guinea and perhaps Malay element, and all that has to be sifted. At

any rate you can readily understand that I have got my hands full, and that, at the same time, I am simply in love with my work. And what more does a fellow want?

Now look here, don't you ever talk any more about my minding your free criticisms: what ever I take, I can give!! Besides as I say it is most delightful to have a chat like this - it's just like the way we used to squabble with poor old "Hicky" at Oxford. By the bye, he is Professor at University College London, isn't he? Of course, I should dearly love to have a personal talk with you, and you can rest assured that if ever I come anywhere near your neighbourhood, you will find I have taken you at your word. Many, many thanks. By the bye, Tylor wrote me such a nice letter - he says he remembers "Tommy's" sketches at Shrumpton's well. Alas! a