Cooktown
Queensland
19 Jan. 98

My dear Spencer, just at present I am on board the "Arara" lying off Townsville on my way to Cooktown, which will be my permanent address for the next few years, where all correspondence will ultimately find me.

I was delighted to receive your letter which reached me just as I was leaving Brisbane. I am looking forward to the printed papers which I trust will come to hand by next mail.

Re. Totemism in Australia, of course "with the proviso that in different parts of the world and in different localities totemism has developed along different lines" (your own words) I cannot do less but think that you are begging the question. Surely you cannot be aware that along a large area of the East Central Queensland Coast Line (where I have been hard at work since last May)
are numerous tribes (some 6 or 7 at least) in which certain duties are forbidden to all the young collectively (male and female, up to periacty), no restrictions of any kind, in some of these tribes, being observed by any of the elders (no matter to which of the four divisions they may belong). That this is not unique for Australia, I have had access to some letters to unpublished notes (which I propose publishing) on tribal customs observed by Assistant Surveyor Robert Austin at Koombana Bay, Port Lechenault, Western Australia, in the years 1840-3, where a similar imposition of certain food stuffs to all the young of the tribe, but none to the elders, is made mention of. [This Mr. Austin, in the discovery of the Murchison Gold Field, has Lake Austin named after him, and still both mentally high and physically strong.]

Example, such as these can certainly not be admitted to be development of Potentia. For my part indeed, I would consider them rather to be a primitive condition, from which, by gradual evolution, the highly organized systems (which you describe, and rightly so, as totemic) in Central Australia have gradually been derived on lines somewhat as follows:

Stage A. On the supposition that the food supply is inadequate to the increased population, the elder (the stronger) combine to force the younger (the weaker) to limit themselves to certain articles of diet, e.g. remnants of which, in the examples already cited. On this same supposition that this is a primitive condition, we can well believe that such is never rare, though if properly looked for, would probably be common.

Stage B. When the younger, the weaker,
progressively increasing in number and gradually insisting on being heard and taking part in the general camp council. She came to terms with the elders (the stronger) and mutually agree in dividing themselves into two parties, each admitting the rights of the other to certain dictates, to maintain which in state, these divisions became exaggerated. This separation of the tribe into two primary divisions, and nothing more is evidently already known to you, e.g. your critique of my work in the "Australasian." Because the descent in my tribes takes place through the mother, I called them gamomatronymous, though in some of yours they could equally well be named gnomatronymous: at any rate this would not interfere with the validity of my argument. Here is every probability of stage B being both contemporary with, as well as subsequent to stage A, the
youngest children to being still prohibited from certain food stuffs.

Stage C. An analagous subdivision, for similar reasons, of each primary division into two again, making the four secondary divisions which are pretty common throughout Australia. A still further advance, on similar lines, would be the recorded cases of divisions into six, and lastly into eight, as alleged to be the case at the back of Barstow, in N. Queensland. Now what I would particularly draw your attention to, under this same Stage C, are the facts that

1) the epigamy of Stage B is still retained.

In other words, the divisions have arrived at that period where they actually regulate the marriage rules: the sexual inequalities and gradually overpowering the food cycle.
(ii) In various animal, it is forbidden to be eaten.

under these four divisions vary in different districts for each similar division — indeed, I have traced the identity of these 4 divisions pretty well step by step from the N.W. Central District across the North East Coast over, whence, travelling down to the Central South Coast we find the condition of things to be a quaternary division of the tribe, upon which, in some cases, only the marriage rules depend, &c. (what I believe) original abstention from certain dictates by all the young indiscriminately being still retained.

(iii) Out of 13 tribes in N.W. Central Province and 7 on the East Coast, there is no connection, traces of the quaternary divisions (which you call totem names, and I, pacemaking,) and any animal, whatever — much less, any totem ceremonies. Stage D, where the various animals withdraw by each division progressively come to have their social and religious interdependence with human beings that you have met with in the central Australian tribe, and other writers in various parts of the Continent, — and which I willingly admit may there be described as Totemism. But even then the highly developed state of affairs cannot to my mind be taken as a standard with which certain allied customs in other parts of the Continent are to be compared.

Of course in an ordinary letter such as this, it is somewhat difficult to detail all the arguments of my hypothesis that the classificatory systems of the Aborigines have originally been dependent on food supply, but the above, though in a crude form, will give you a rough outline of
my theory of reasoning. Indeed from what I have been able to gather personally from both extremes of the colony of Queensland, I find nothing approaching to what you mention in the way of totems, or any ceremonies connected with them, and you will therefore understand my reason for being so guarded in the use of the term. The number of careful observers throughout the Continent is at present too limited to allow of the assumption that because connection have been found between groups of animals, and groups of individuals, there are necessarily a development of totemism; it would be an equally preposterous to suppose that because certain N.W. Central Queensland aborigines, having refused to eat pork, a positive fact, there is a development of totemism. At any rate, taking all the above in conjunction, I think
even you will admit that my hypothesis (which I have expressed in the Queensland Royal Society Transactions soon to be published) is tangible, as compared with the opinion that Potemien in its original meaning of a social or religious (or both combined) interdependence with individuals — and when that term is used we cannot admit the proviso to which you, in your letter, maintain — has been "dumped" both below onto the Australian Continent.

With regard to the various terms used in my Clarification system, you will understand my original difficulty in finding names to suit various classes which I found to be common everywhere (i.e. East and West limits of the Colony) and so long as the etymology of the word sufficed to
explain what was intended to be expressed, this cacophony it really does not need. Matter, I have used the same terms in my MSS, which I am holding back for incorporation with a larger work which I have in view, "On the Aborigines of the Rockhampton and surrounding Coast District" although I propose, in this paper, taking your advice (for which many thanks) about altering the word "Patronym" in future, Ethnology. I would think from more suitable to express Tribal name. I may admit that at the time, even of going to Press, I did not like the word "Patronym" too well, because of my having read of descent through the mother (so far a tribal name was concerned) recorded elsewhere, although I had neither heard of nor met with such a case in my district; I took care to protect myself however by calling it "Patronym or Tribal Name". On similar grounds I don't like your expression "totoname" for the simple reason that there are cases (e.g. East Central Australia Coast) where step divisions have certainly nothing to do with totem. But after all, what does it matter, so long as our readers can understand what we mean? On the other hand, if one of us employs a term such as "climauyn" (which expresses "step-ladder name" in reference to the progressive titular distinction on the social "ring") it would be undesirable I think for you to alter it or rename it, especially in view of the fact that I am first in the field to have recorded it; furthermore I have found "climauyn" in East Queensland, as well as a justification for all the other terms introduced when speaking of the N.W.C. District.
With regard to the particular men taking part in the sexual orgies at a woman's initiation ceremony, among the Yirra Pirra, (with whom I could make myself understood) I remember noting the fact which you will find recorded in my work that any male can partake so long as they do not belong to the same氏族 as the woman; i.e. she may have connection at this ceremonial only, with even individuals of groups of men into which she is otherwise not allowed to marry. I was particularly struck with this circumstance at the time, because until then I was firmly of opinion that the clannification system necessarily prevented incest or rather too-close consanguinity, which it certainly does not.

The only case to which the "bull-roarer" I found to be put in the N.W. Central District,
which if you look up will be found in
my work (of which, unfortunately I have
not a copy to hand) are as
(1) togo, (2) love-charms, (3) specially
concerned with initiation ceremonies, by
males only (not even allowed to be viewed
by females). The markings on these vary,
but they are invariably red or chestnut,
with a pattern in charcoal often superadded.

The natives will spin you any yarn you
like so as to the signification of the
markings taken together, but as any two
never agreed, and one man would vary
his own statement ad libitum, it was useless
recording them—no definite accuracy
would have been arrived at. The ring of
concentric circles was very commonly de-
scribed as the circling of the flame of fire
at night time when the smouldering stick
was whirled round and round with the
I really cannot admit much similarity, e.g. your suggestions as to origin of introduction, between a "whistle" and a marsupial penis; an aviian one would be more to the point. We must look to the origin of such a custom or institution somewhere in the natural framework upon which all evolutionary processes have been built, e.g. either in sexual attraction, utility, ministry of "spare caprice" (a little unrecognized factor in nature's economy) would hardly do. Indeed it seems to me that its origin will always be shrouded in obscurity, though a companion with the various penal ornamentations meet with in New Caledonia, New Guinea, Borneo, and Malaya generally must not be lost sight of.

Strange to say, I have a record of a leader of a tribe black by visiting some guine the Easter extended arm; which another pattern was pretty generally, known as representative of the female genitals. These bell-ringers act as the signal for women to keep at a distance only when any of their ceremonies are taking place; if they hear the bell-ringer they know that their presence is not yet permissible. I learnt nothing of their whirring noise being indicative of spirit's sound.

Concerning avenging parties, if you like to call them so, they certainly have taken place: the avenger, if strong enough, will surround the delinquents camp at early dawn and demand his person — if he is not forthcoming, by brother (blood or group) — the particulars are being picked by his elders - pays the penalty. Of course, the two camps may fight for it collectively. Death is the punishment (see my chapter on this) for marrying a prohibited person.
slope of Cape York Peninsula and being
punished by death with the additional
mutilation of the sexual organ: the penis
had been split down the centre
pinned backwards and outwards by a
sharpened twig.

By the by, Pornography is no invention
of mine — you can afford one too! —
look up any dictionary, you like, say the
"Century" (the latest) and you will find it
to express "obscenity in general." Furthermore
the Government originally intended omitting
the last chapter with accompanying plate,
and publishing it separately for special
distribution to certain people only, mainly
for the purpose of drawing public attention
to the present condition of the certain of the
along the is view of the Legislation proposed
to be enforced. The ordinary reading public
had at all sense to be protected by being told that such and such a chapter was obscene, and that they could please themselves if they chose to read it. And after all, scientific and interesting as it may be to men like us, they in certainly not so to the general lay reader. Personally, I admire and respect the aborigine—so long as they are not corrupted by opium, alcohol or syphilis.

The Government of the tribe by a council of elders is that about which you write. I will take for information, you will find described somewhere in the chapter on Punishment, Fighting &c. I have met with no division of the tribe into local groups, in the sense of each group occupying a definite area of country— as I find to have been the case from Austin's note, in the old days in Western Australia. Of course,
I am writing all this in the conviction that you will be taking all this criticism and argument in the proper sense in which it is intended, and on that premise, I trust you will continue it, and send me more next time. At any rate I know that in your forthcoming work you will give me credit for anything I may have done in the way of priority.

Yes, I am indeed a lucky fellow: the Protectorate of the whole hottown and central districts in my hands. The main, and only drawback is that, travelling about so much and not so large an area, I shall be prevented learning any language thoroughly—the real key-note of the situation. Though I shall only be accompanied by blacks as much as possible. However, I will ride and learn as much as I can.

Now, to return to personalities. I also went home and spent 91 and part of 92 very quietly in London, and working night and day; managed to take my double medical qualification. I am very thankful now that I did. I never had the heart to go up to dear old Oxford—a fact which I now regret. However, I am glad to hear through you of all the dear old fellows who need to work in the “lab.” I had heard of poor little Boys’ death, the first of us to go.

After taking my brother’s practice in Sydney for 6 months, I did a trip in the ill-fated “Caltorlinia” up to China and Japan, just before the war, and on my return in ‘92 started out into the West of Queensland. Last May I went my step, southward, and worked up the districts around the Central Coast, on similar lines. It was not until my arrival
in Brisbane at the end of October, and after going to press, that I was able to make a somewhat systematic study of the literature, so that you were quite right in your surmises expressed in the Australian. Hoping soon to receive a copy of your magnum opus, as well as the other papers. Believe me, always sincerely yours,

Walter E. Roll