

I.

Cooktown

4

Queensland

19 Jan 98

My dear Spencer. Just at present I am on board the "Aramac" 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 dietaries are forbidden to all the young collectively (male and female up to puberty), 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 That this is not unique for Australia, I have had access to some hitherto unpublished notes (which I propose publishing) on Tribal customs etc observed by Assistant Surveyor Robert Austin at Koombarra Bay, Port Lockchuanult, Western Australia, in the years 1840-3 where a similar impediment of certain food-stuffs to all the young of the tribe, but none to the elders, is mentioned of. [This Mr Austin in the discovery of the Murchison Gold Field, has Lake Austin named after him, and ^{is} still both mentally hale and physically hearty.]

Example such as these can certainly not be admitted to be developments of Totemism; for my own part indeed I would consider them rather to be a primitive condition, from which, by gradual evolution, the highly organised 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 elders (the stronger) combine to force the younger (the weaker) to limit themselves to certain articles of diet. E.g. remnants of this, in the example already cited, on this same supposition that this is a primitive condition, we can well believe that such is now 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 etc come 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 districts, to maintain which in statu quo these divisions became exogamous. 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 ~~took~~^{takes} place through the mother, I called them gamomatryms, though in some of yours they could equally well be named gamopatryms: at any rate this would not interfere with the validity of my argument. There is every probability of stage B being both contemporary with, as well as subsequent to stage A, the

youngest children etc 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 Burketown, in N. Queensland. Now what I would particularly draw your attention to, under this same stage C, are the facts that

(1) the exogamy of Stage B is still retained. In other words, the divisions have arrived at that period where they actually regulate the marriage-rule: the sexual are equalling and gradually overpowering the food regulation.

(ii) The various animal etc 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. Coast District across to the North East Coast ones, whence, travelling down to the Central East 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, the (what I believe) original abstention from certain dietaries by all the young indiscriminately being still retained.

(iii) Out of 13 tribes in N.W. Central Queensland and 7 on the East Coast, there is no connection traceable in the ^{names of the} quaternary divisions (which you call totem names, and I, preclomatomys) and any animal etc that were - much less, any Totem ceremonies.

Stage D. where the various animal etc belong by each division progressively come to have that social and religious interdependence with human beings that you have met with in the Central Australian tribe, and other ^{writers} ~~languages~~ in various parts of the Continent, - and which I willingly admit may there be described as Totemism. But even then this 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 a thing, 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 ^{course} ~~views~~ 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 ^{certain} connections have been found between groups of animals and groups of individuals, there are necessarily a development of totemism: it would be as equally preposterous to suppose that because certain N.W. Central Queensland aborigines invariably refuse to eat pork, a positive fact, therein 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 Totemism in its original meaning of
a social or religious (or both combined)
~~is~~ interdependence with individuals
— and when that term is used, we cannot
admit the proviso etc which you, in your
letter, maintain — has been "dumped" holus
bolus onto the Australian Continent.

With regard to the various terms used in
my Clarificatory system, you will under-
stand my original difficulty in finding
names to suit various clans 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

With regard to the particular men taking part in the sexual orgie at a woman's initiation ceremony, among the Pitia Pitia^{etc} (with whom I could make myself understood) I remember noting the fact which you will find recorded in my work that any males can partake so long as they do not belong to the same padonastrom 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 classificatory system necessarily prevented incest or rather too-close ~~any~~ consanguinity, which it certainly does not.

The only uses to which the "bull-roarers" I found to be put in the N.W. Central Districts

which if you look up, will be found in my work (of which unfortunately I have not a copy to hand) are as

- (1) toys, (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-ochre marked, with a pattern in charcoal often superadded. The natives will "spin" you any yarn you like ~~as~~ as to the significations of the markings taken together, but as any two never agreed, and one man would vary his own statement ad lib, it was useless recording them - no definite accuracy would have been arrived at. The ring of concentric circles was very commonly described as the circling of the flame of fire at night-time when the ~~burning~~ ^{smouldering} stick was whirled round and round with the

extended arm: which another pattern was pretty generally known as representative of the female genital. These bull-woomen act as the signal for women to keep at a distance only, when any of these ceremonies are taking place: if they hear the bull-woomen they know that their presence is not yet permissible. I learnt nothing of their whirring noise being indicative of Spirit's sounds.

Concerning avenging parties, if you like to call them so, they certainly have taken place: the avengers, if strong enough, will surround the delinquent's camp at early dawn and demand his person - if he is not forthcoming, ~~the~~ brother (blood or group) - the particulars are being picked by his elders & pay 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.

I really cannot admit much similarity, re your suggestion as to origin of introduction, between a "whistles" and a marsupial penis: an avian one would be more to the point. We must look to the origin of such a custom as introduced somewhere in the natural framework upon which all evolutionary processes have been built. e.g. either in sexual attraction, utility, mimicry etc - ^{your idea of a} "pure caprice" (a hitting

unrecognised factor in nature's economy) would hardly do. Indeed it seems to me, that its origin will always be shrouded in obscurity, though a comparison with the various penile ornamentation, ^{and mutilation} met 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 trader's Black boy visiting some gins on the eastern

slope of Cape York Peninsula and being
punished by death with the additional
mutilation of the sexual organ: the penis
had been split down ^{in the centre}, each half being
pinned backwards and outwards ^{on the body} by a
sharpened twig.

By the bye, Pornography is no invention
of mine - you an Oxford man 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 plates,
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
aborigine in view of the legislation proposed
to be enforced. The ordinary reading public

had in a 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 ^{then particulars} as ~~it~~ may be to men like us, they are 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 etc about which you write ^{me} for for information, you will find described somewhere in the chapter on Punishment, Fighting etc. I have met with no divisions 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 notes, in the old days, in Western Australia. Of course,

I am writing all this in the conviction that you are taking all this criticism and argument in the proper sense in which it is intended, and on that presumption 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 northern and Central Districts in my hands. The main, and only drawback is that, travelling about so much and over 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 not 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 used to work in the "Lab": I had heard of poor little Pole's 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 "Catterthun" up to China and Japan, just before the war, and on my return in '94 started out into the West of Queensland. Last May I ~~went~~^{set} my steps southwards, working 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 *Australasian*.

Hoping soon to receive a copy of
your magnum opus, as well as the other
papers

Believe me

Always sincerely yours

Walter S. Roth